





HIDE AND SEEK.

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BY

W WILKIE COLLINS,

AUTHOR OF "ANTONINA," "BASIL," &c.

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CHAPTER I.

A GLANCE BACKWARD.

THE years that have elapsed since Zack's childhood have not been passed without producing some very perceptible changes for the worse in his father's personal appearance. Beyond this, however, the altering influence of Time has had but little effect on Mr. Thorpe. As to principles, habits, and manner, he is still the same rigid, grave, and joyless gentleman who, on a certain memorable Sunday, locked up his son in the dressing-room for bad behaviour at church.

Though not older than Mr. Valentine Blyth, Mr. Thorpe now looked the painter's senior by at least twenty years. His hair had become

prematurely white. His eyes were so uniformly and coldly thoughtful in expression, that they seemed to be but half alive. His natural slenderness of build had worn away gradually, in the course of time, almost to emaciation. His face was even more attenuated than his figure; it was so fleshless that the cheek-bones seemed to project unnaturally over hollows of pale dry skin, deeply wrinkled in a downward direction, on either side of his nose and mouth. These evidences of external decay could not be ascertained to proceed from any directly physical cause. Mr. Thorpe certainly suffered at times from nervous attacks; but the general state of his health was, on the other hand, perfectly satisfactory, not only to himself, but even to the family doctor as well. His friends said that he had grown to look aged before his time, from incessant mental anxiety, which anxiety they invariably and indignantly connected with the name of Zack. Mr. Thorpe allowed them to talk as they pleased on this topic, never absolutely accepting or absolutely rejecting the condolences that were offered to him on the subject of his wayward son.

He had always been a remarkably silent man, and his taciturn habits had increased as he increased in years. His was not sulky, or mysterious, or variable silence ; it seemed habitual and constitutional. What words he did utter were always of the same simple and straightforward kind. He never exaggerated in his talk, never used colloquial phrases, and never approached violence of language, even in the most trying moments of his intercourse with Zack.

He had inherited a sufficiently large fortune (amassed in commerce by his father), to absolve him from all necessity of working for his livelihood ; but he was by no means an idle man on that account. Possessing very strong religious feelings ; belonging to that large and respectable congregation of devout persons who seem to look at their religion exclusively from a controversial point of view, and to prize it chiefly for the sake of enforcing its prohibitions, Mr. Thorpe was just the man to feel an active and conscientious interest in the theological politics of his day. He was warmly attached to that particular section of professing Christians which is technically described as containing the "Low

Church Party ;” and liberally devoted his time, his energies, and his purse to the service of the enterprising community to which he belonged. He was an active member of more than one Alliance for propagating Protestantism and annihilating Popery ; he was an influential and generous Director of a famous Tract Society ; he was Secretary to a local School Establishment, organised for the express purpose of preventing the Romanists from getting any ignorant children to teach ; he was head of one of the Branch-Home-Correspondence-Departments of a wealthy Missionary Corporation ; he was President of a lay Assembly of private gentlemen associated for the purpose of examining and interpreting Prophecy, —in short, he was always occupied in one way or another—controversially, proselytisingly, or theologically—in advancing with all his heart and might, the best interests of the powerful religious party to whose service he was attached.

The house at Baregrove Square was not a hospitable house ; for its master was not a man who delighted in festivals, and expanded under the influences of social intercourse. He limited himself to giving small and mournful dinner-

parties, choosing his guests from the friends who laboured with him in the various societies to which he belonged, and from the clergymen under whose advice and influence they all acted. The conversation was invariably on controversial subjects on these occasions; the decanters circulated slowly after dinner; texts (generally selected from the most mystical passages in the Revelation) were “expounded” upstairs in the drawing-room, by way of evening recreation. Zack was always ordered to be present at these solemnities for his own good; and suffered under the consequent mortification of flesh and spirit severely.

Sometimes he was ignominiously aroused before everybody, from semi-oblivious slumbers, while the “expounding” was in full progress. Sometimes he was discovered, and pitilessly checked, in manœuvring to get the tardy decanters prematurely brought within his own reach. Sometimes he was reproved and lectured for abruptly leaving the dining-room before Mr. Thorpe and his guests had risen from table. Zack himself used to account for this last dereliction of duty to Mr. Blyth, by assuring that

gentleman that he was obliged to run out of the room to avoid being overcome by certain morbid yearnings to tumble head over heels, to imitate the crowing of a cock, and to grind the heads of seriously minded gentlemen against the wall behind them, which always disastrously assailed him whenever there was a pause in the solemn flow of conversation at his father's table.

Mr. Thorpe's only approach to any such levity as a recreation for his leisure hours consisted in gathering together and arranging autograph letters of celebrated men. The first places in this collection were assigned to ancient and modern divines; the second to politicians, especially those whose statesman-like deafness to cries for reform recommended them to the admiration of a Conservative posterity; the third to military and naval heroes; and the fourth to scientific celebrities. There was also a fifth, last, and lowest place, which was assigned to famous authors,—an arrangement, by the way, perfectly in harmony with that ailing literary patriotism peculiar to the English Constitution, which is still too delicate to bear the shock of seeing a national statue of Shakspeare erected, or the

names of the illustrious brethren of Shakspeare's order inscribed, on any one of the great public sites and streets of the British metropolis.

His books of autographs (for he had many volumes of them) seemed to be the principal solace of Mr. Thorpe's hours of repose by his own fireside. Engravings of the celebrated writers of the celebrated letters were neatly let into the top divisions of the thick quarto leaves which gave size and solidity to the books. They were all neatly bound in the same sad-coloured morocco suits, with indexes at the end, neatly written in Mr. Thorpe's own hand. He used often to sit for hours together, silently turning over the leaves of his collection; smoothing out accidentally crumpled pages of the letters, sticking them tight with gum at places where they had started, dusting the surface of the engravings gently with a large camel's hair brush; and, in fact, keeping the whole collection perfectly speckless in every part of it, from the first volume to the last. He never seemed to care much about showing his autographs to others; he never boasted about them, and never talked of what they had cost. He had a silent, thoughtful,

undemonstrative pleasure in enjoying them entirely by himself, in his own study, and that was all.

Though in no sense of the word a domestic tyrant, he nevertheless reigned quietly and unobtrusively despotic over every member of his household,—always excepting the ever-graceless and revolutionary Zack. The housemaid never “over-slept” herself, the cook was never unpunctual with dinner, and the page was always ready to answer the door, at Baregrove Square. Winter and summer, spring and autumn, the whole domestic machine revolved always with the same unrelenting and ceaseless regularity. Morning and evening prayers were celebrated, the bell rang for breakfast at half-past eight, the front door was bolted for the night at eleven o’clock, never, in any instance, five minutes before, or five minutes after the appointed time. Accident, forgetfulness, hurry, delay, were four words practically superfluous to the English language under Mr. Thorpe’s roof. His will possessed some inscrutable superiority which rendered it easily master of the wills of others who lived in daily contact with him. Still

always excepting his insubordinate son, he so completely assimilated every soul in his abode to himself and his habits, that the whole household, down to the very boy who blacked the shoes, seemed to live only to reflect the domestic character, and develop the domestic principles of Mr. Thorpe.

His wife was a remarkable example of his mysterious power of moulding the dispositions of others into perfect conformity with his own, without the slightest apparent effort, and without his influence being in any respect felt by those about him.

Although Mrs. Thorpe had less of the turbulent old Goodworth blood in her veins than any other member of her family, her manner, before her marriage, always exhibited palpable traces of her father's vivacity, and her conversation was always more or less enlivened by some hereditary sparkles of her Irish mother's wit. But, after her union with Mr. Thorpe, these natural characteristics began, one by one, to disappear. Gradually and insensibly the gay word and the joyous laugh came less and less frequently from her lips. Old friends of the

Goodworths who could not prevail upon themselves to face Mr. Thorpe for the sake of seeing his wife, except at rare intervals, always remarked with astonishment how completely she was changed, how unnaturally like her husband she seemed to have become, and how amazingly positive she was in agreeing with him in all his most outrageous opinions, and all his most capricious tastes.

In time, the poor lady began to reflect her husband faithfully, even in personal appearance ; she grew to resemble him outwardly and visibly by growing thin. Her father's favourite joke, in her days of plump girlhood, about buying a small steam-engine to lace her stays tight enough would have been wretched mockery in her days of wedded life. She lost, too, in complexion and gait, as well as in figure ; these and other personal changes, which it would be ungallant to mention, proceeding, however, from no unusual bodily ailment, and, most assuredly, from no mental disappointment. They were simply the necessary physical consequences of the moral transformation effected in her by her union with Mr. Thorpe.

At the time of her marriage it had been whispered about among her friends that she had misconstrued some very ordinary attentions paid her by Mr. Thorpe, had fallen in love with him, and had long pined for him in secret, before he discovered it, and—more out of honour than affection—made his proposals to her. Her relations disapproved of her choice, but did not openly oppose it, and never plainly contradicted the rumours just alluded to. Whether they were true or not, it is at least certain that she was passionately fond of her husband, worshipping him of course only with that correctly-regulated species of amatory devotion which it was conjugally proper to offer to such a man. She thought him the wisest and perfectest of created beings. She accepted all his worst prejudices as semi-divine inspirations and truths. She judged everybody by his standard, and shuddered over all her acquaintances accordingly. She delighted in paying the most servile obedience to his slightest caprices. His minutest household formalities were sacred family ethics to her. If, for instance, one of her best friends had declared in her presence that nine o'clock was a good

ordinary breakfast hour for families, she would have disagreed with the assertion immediately (though naturally the least disputatious human being ever created); and would have insisted that half-past eight was the better time—simply and solely because Mr. Thorpe had fixed half-past eight as the breakfast hour at Baregrove Square. Thinking with her husband, feeling with him, living in his life, her heart was the moral thermometer which indicated the minutest changes of temperature in the atmosphere of his—indicated them truly to a hair's breadth, except in the one solitary case when the variations were referable to the stormy influence of Zack.

Towards her son she was still secretly unchanged. The old, loving, instinctive pride of her earliest maternal days in the beauty of her child, retained unassailably the same strong place in her heart which it had always held. Other shrines once seated there, beautiful and holy in their day, had long since been overthrown: *this* shrine remained indestructible to the last.

She wept often and bitterly over Zack's quarrels with his father; she was shocked and terrified, and indignant and despairing, by turns,

at witnessing Zack's reckless insubordination—but she never once felt towards him as her husband felt, even in the lad's wildest excesses of scampish irregularity. That first affectionate, all-pervading sense of triumph which she used to feel at looking on her boy, or thinking of him, in his childish days, would burn on, warm as ever at her heart (though she tried hard to believe that it was sinful)—often at the very time when she was echoing, with tears in her eyes, her husband's fiercest condemnation of their son's rebellious conduct. She could say his behaviour was unpardonable, she could tell Zack himself that it was unpardonable, and she could determine to feel conscientiously, that it must be unpardonable; but still, in spite of all, the mother's pride in his fine stature, his handsome healthy open face, his strength, hardihood, and high spirit, would plead for him; and, worse still, would often secretly take Zack's side against his father, though it was the wife's household religion firmly to believe that her husband was invariably in the right.

Perhaps, Mr. Thorpe suspected this weakness in her character, and believed accordingly that

her advice would be useless to him on any subject connected with his son's delinquencies; for, though he often consulted clergymen and devout friends about the best method of disciplining Zack, he never sought so much as five minutes' counsel from Zack's mother on that perplexing topic. Perhaps, on the other hand, he not only suspected his wife's weakness, but made allowance for it, and mercifully forbore, whenever he could, from submitting it to painful tests. He might well and justly have acted thus from motives of sympathy and humility only; for he had an abiding weakness of his own which exercised a curiously-debilitating influence over his otherwise vigorous and unbending disposition.

His one worldly ambition was to preserve intact the character of a respectable man. His one moral weakness was the constant dread of accidentally compromising this character, if he deviated in the smallest degree from the established routine of his chosen opinions, employments, society, and daily habits. His standard of respectability was unlimited and uncompromising. That widely-worshipped axiom of our commercial morality which asserts that

any man (or rascal) is respectable who can “pay his way,” was an axiom at which Mr. Thorpe shuddered. His vigorous respectability—both in theory and practice — ascended incomparably higher and descended ineffably lower than the weakly respectabilities of most of his neighbours. It rose to the climax of the most Puritanical virtue and the most impossible mortal perfection : it sank to the most humble and familiar of the manners and customs of everyday life. It embraced at once the strictest watchfulness in preserving the proprieties of temper and the proprieties of dress. It was equally vigilant in regulating the flow of his language and the length of his nails. It began with his behaviour at church : it ended with his behaviour at tea.

If he worshipped respectability devoutly, he also worshipped it sincerely. If he anxiously washed the outside of the cup and platter, he did not forget to keep the inside clean too. He was not more virtuous in the broad glare of noonday than he was under cover of the darkest night. He was no such time-server, money-server, or rank-server with high moral principles, as may be seen among us every day. He was no hypocrite

who secretly petted the sins that allured him and openly castigated the sins that were not to his taste. In grim, uncompromising, very truth, he was what he assumed to be; what he gloried in being; what he dreaded as the direst of degradations not to be—a respectable man. All the secret pulses of his moral and mental life hung together on the same thread (it is never more than a thread, in this world), which elevated his character above the reach of calumnies of every kind, great and small. As credit is prized by a merchant; as circulation is prized by an author; as reputation is prized by a woman—so was respectability prized by Mr. Thorpe.

If he had not had any children, or, having them, if they had been daughters—or, to take the case as it really stood—if his son had happened to be of a quiet, passive, and cool-blooded nature, the various peculiarities which altogether composed Mr. Thorpe's character would never have reached that disastrous prominence, as domestic agents, into which circumstances had forced them, now and for some time past. Having, however, a son who was neither quiet, nor passive, nor cool-blooded; who seemed incomprehensibly to have

inherited a disposition from his mother's family instead of his father's loins; whose exuberant energies, wild flow of spirits, and restless craving after excitement, dissipation, and change, would have tried the endurance of the most indulgent parental rule—having, in short, such a son as Zack, every one of Mr. Thorpe's favourite prejudices, principles, and opinions acquired a fatal importance, merely from the direct influence which they involuntarily exercised, not only in aggravating the filial irregularities, but also even in producing those very offences which he was most vigilantly anxious to restrain. Such pages of this book as are destined faithfully to relate the tribulations of Zack, must not shrink from candidly acknowledging that the first cause which immediately produced them was often, in plain words, no other than Mr. Thorpe himself.

Among the list of capacities which some people seem to be born without possessing, or bred without acquiring, may be included the power of recognising their own motives, passions, and frailties, when reproduced in the actions of others who happen to be their inferiors in station, or their juniors in years. When a lady and gentleman

in love and small circumstances, for example, both agree in considering that the motive which makes them want to be married may reasonably reconcile them to the sacrifice of every advantage which they respectively enjoyed in their bachelor and spinster conditions, as well as to the risk of every social misfortune which may follow an imprudent marriage; and when they have been accordingly matrimonially associated together for life, it is by no means unusual to hear both husband and wife declare that they are highly astonished or extremely indignant, if their housemaid or cook happen to espouse a footman without prospects, or a greengrocer in a declining way of business. They cannot possibly understand how the girl can have been so infatuated as to give up a good place where she was perfectly comfortable and was saving money, with the risk of starvation, ill-treatment, or desertion absolutely staring her in the face all the time! The mistress laments over her imprudence with other married ladies, who cordially agree with her. The master appeals confidently, and not in vain, to other husbands to know if they ever before heard of such a fool in their lives.

Suggest either to the lady or the gentleman, that John the footman and Jane the housemaid have only felt with their motives, acted with their passions, and obeyed, under the same circumstances, exactly the same human instincts which Master and Mistress have obeyed before them ; and, ten to one, both husband and wife stare with astonishment and start simultaneously, as if they had been invested, for the first time in their lives, with eyesight enough to recognise themselves in the glass which is held up before them by the conduct of others.

So again with fathers and sons. How many parents are there who are capable of remembering what they were at twenty, when their sons happen to have arrived at that age ? How many can be found who are able frankly to renew acquaintance, in memory only, with such juvenile indiscretions as their children's irregularities sometimes drag by main force of analogy from the convenient limbo of oblivion ? How many fathers who feel violently irritated or deeply grieved at finding that their sons cannot practically absorb, in the course of an hour or two, the whole flood of good advice poured upon them from the paternal

reservoir of morality, which has only been fed to overflowing by the accumulations of many years, drawn from that stream of wisdom whose first source was Experience—how many fathers suffering under such parental disappointment as this, are clever enough to find consolation for the present, and hope and guidance for the future, in the remembrance that they themselves also, in their day, were oftentimes sadly shallow and leaky recipients of the full flow of paternal counsel? How many really possess a serviceable capacity of this kind—or, possessing, are able to employ it for their own advantage and the advantage of their children? About the same number, probably, which would also include the sum total of ladies and gentlemen who are sharp-sighted enough to recognise their own matrimonial motives, when exactly reflected before them in the marriages of their inferiors.

Now, although it must have appeared perfectly evident to anybody acquainted with Mr. Thorpe, even by sight only, that his character at twenty could not have resembled the character of his son at the same age, it is also equally certain, as a plain human fact, that Zack's father when a lad,

and Zack's father when a gentleman of fifty, must have been in many important respects two very different individuals. The baits with which the Devil fished for Mr. Thorpe at twenty, and for Mr. Thorpe's son after him, at those years, might have been different enough; but the one must have been allured—and caught, too, sometimes—by the special temptation which was proper to attract him, just as cleverly as the other was—caught, and perhaps thrown back into the infernal angler's well-stocked human preserves, to be neatly hooked again at some future period.

Had Mr. Thorpe any memory at all for the temptations which, as a fallible being, he must himself sometimes have succumbed to in his youth, on any of the numerous occasions when he passed merciless sentence of condemnation on the frailties of Zack? Did his power of making comparisons and tracing resemblances (though competent enough for all ordinary emergencies) ever help him to the discovery that, however different in degree his faults and his son's, as young men, might appear, the first motive causes, the original moral weaknesses which led to them, were, nevertheless, in virtue of their common

human derivation, of similar nature in both cases? Did he ever recognise any family likeness to past fallibilities of his own, in the fallibilities which led Zack astray into forbidden paths? Never: he was too busy in fighting blindly with results to look back into causes and into himself. His own conduct proved it, if nothing else did. For, whatever other paternal experiments he might try, he never once attempted the justest, the most merciful, and the most promising of all—the experiment of sometimes making allowances before he passed judgment on Zack.

A specimen has already been presented of his method of religiously educating his son, at six years old, by making him attend a church service of two hours in length; as, also, of the manner in which he sought to drill the child into premature discipline by dint of Sabbath restrictions and Select Bible Texts. When that child grew to a boy, and when the boy developed to a young man, Mr. Thorpe's educational system still resolutely persisted in being what it had always been from the first. His idea of Religion defined it to be a system of prohibitions; and, by a natural consequence, his idea of Education

defined *that* to be a system of prohibitions also.

He was not a man to pause for an instant at reducing theory to practice. He never distrusted himself; and what he thought it right to do, that he did, undismayed alike by logical confutation or practical ill result. His plan of bringing up his son once formed, no earthly consideration could move him from it an inch, one way or the other. He had two favourite phrases to answer every form of objection, every variety of reasoning, every citation of examples. No matter with what arguments the members of Mrs. Thorpe's family from time to time assailed him, the same two replies were invariably shot back at them in turn from the parental quiver. Mr. Thorpe calmly—always calmly—said, first, that he “would never compound with vice” (which, by the way, was what nobody asked him to do), and, secondly, that he would, in no instance, great or small, “consent to act from a principle of expediency:” this last assertion, in the case of Zack, being about equivalent to saying that if he set out to walk due north, and met a lively young bull galloping with his head down due south, he would not consent to

save his own bones, or yield the animal space enough to run on, by stepping aside a single inch in a lateral direction, east or west.

His system of education acted badly enough with Zack as a child ; worse still with Zack as a boy at school ; worst of all with Zack as a young man, just ready to accept a vocation for life. At this latter period of the son's career, the father's infatuated obstinacy claims especial attention ; for at this period it produced the most fatal results.

CHAPTER II.



THE TRIBULATIONS OF ZACK.

NARROWNESS and intolerance were characteristic in various degrees of all Mr. Thorpe's opinions ; and they especially distinguished his opinions on the sort of permanent occupation which he thought it desirable that his son should choose. Four professions which the general voice of the civilised world is accustomed to call honourable, he condemned in a breath. The army and navy were to be carefully shunned, because officers were often tempted to dissipation in quarters or in port. Medicine and law were equally inadmissible on high moral grounds ; the first because it led the student to materialism and drunkenness ; the second because it fostered infidelity by confusing the boundaries between right and wrong. Divinity was left as the last profession to choose, and the

only profession of which Mr. Thorpe approved ; provided always that it wrangled on his side of the question, and wrought to attain his favourite ends. The second place in his estimation was occupied by Commerce ; principally because many of his devout friends happened to be mercantile friends also. Beyond this he did not think it desirable to look. He had the hope of hoisting Zack up into the pulpit, and the resource, in case of failure, of jamming him down to the desk. What more could so practical-minded a parent possibly want ?

But for the opposition of some clerical friends, who trembled naturally enough for the credit of their cloth, it is extremely probable that Mr. Thorpe—acting upon his favourite principle that he knew best what was good for his son—would actually have persisted in trying to force the lad into the Church. Compelled to resign this project, under advice which he felt bound to respect, he chose the commercial alternative, as a matter of course ; and from that second choice there was no appeal.

To say nothing of Zack's character as a child—to pass over entirely the whole tenor of his

behaviour as a boy at school—his mode of life at home, while waiting for the commercial situation to which he was destined, was of itself enough to have warned almost any father but Mr. Thorpe, that all the men of business in the British empire would utterly fail in turning the young gentleman to the smallest commercial account. His wild, restless energies, which had found vent at school in the cricket-field and the play-ground ; in winning a fight one day, and leading the way into a desperate scrape the next; broke vigorously into a new outlet the moment he came home. His father at once forbade him the use of every London pleasure—the innocent as well as the guilty ; but could not forbid him, by any form of veto short of a set of fetters, the use of his arms and legs for the stated purpose of healthful exercise. This was the manner in which Master Zack contrived to get the largest possible quantity of enjoyment out of the only privilege which he succeeded in wringing from the parental despotism of Mr. Thorpe :—

He always began the day by rising at five o'clock, in gallant defiance of the cold and rainy autumn weather then prevailing. In three minutes

he had huddled on all his clothes ; in three more he had ravished from the larder as much bread, cheese, and cold meat as his pockets would hold, and was ready to start for a morning wash in the Hampstead Ponds. No matter what might be the condition of the atmosphere and the water, he stripped in the first, and dashed into the second, to swim for an appetite just as other men walk for it. His next process was to dry himself, in glorious independence of any such effeminacy as a towel, by skipping, tumbling, and jumping all round the margin of the pond, in the cold air ; after which, he lightened his pockets luxuriously of a pound or so of provisions, by swallowing his breakfast meal. Having eaten his fill, he was ready for a walk that generally averaged about twenty miles before he got home ; meeting in the course of these pedestrian excursions with all sorts of adventures, which he was wise enough to keep secret from the paternal ears. Sometimes, in the vagabond variety of his rambles, he lighted on a country fair ; sometimes he roamed about with gipsies ; sometimes he came up with a pack of hounds, and followed the hunt bravely on foot. No matter where he wandered, he talked to every

man, woman, or child who would listen to him. Gentlemen abandoned their reserve, and rogues forgot their suspicion, when he accosted them. He scraped acquaintance with horsemen in hunting-fields, and sat amicably with tinkers in dry ditches ; just as much at his ease with the one set of companions as the other ; and equally ready, in the high company or the low, to tell anybody who cared to know it, all about his family affairs, and how badly he and his father agreed together. Pedlars, trampers, and labourers—squires, farmers, and publicans—all men were welcome alike to the cosmopolitan sympathies of Zack.

Such was the chaotic raw material out of which Mr. Thorpe proposed to create the various component parts necessary to the formation of an orderly commercial character !

Although old Mr. Goodworth had died before his grandson had left school, there were other members of his daughter's family left, who took interest enough in her son to expostulate seriously and often with Mr. Thorpe on his resolution to force Zack into a commercial career. They urged with perfect truth, that the lad's mad spirits and inveterately roving disposition entirely unfitted

him for all staid and regular pursuits. They entreated that his own wishes might at least be consulted by way of experiment, even though it should afterwards appear impracticable to comply with them. They suggested getting him a good berth in the merchant navy, or attaching him to an exploring expedition in Australia, which was then talked of; or letting him join as volunteer on board the next ship destined for Arctic discovery—asserting that such adventurous employments as they proposed, or others resembling them, were alone fitted to suit his restless disposition, exercise his hardy physical powers, and familiarise him with useful and necessary discipline. Mr. Thorpe always listened to this sensible advice, often as it was reiterated, with unruffled composure and elaborate attention; admitted, with the slightest possible breath of sarcasm in his voice, that the schemes suggested might be perfectly wise and feasible in a worldly point of view, but added that he felt it his duty, definitely and without the smallest hesitation, to reject them, from conscientious considerations connected, he deeply regretted to acknowledge, with the perilous spiritual condition of Zack.

“My son requires the most unremitting parental discipline and control,” Mr. Thorpe used to say, by way of conclusion. “When he is not under my own eye at home, he must be under the eyes of devout friends, in whom I can place unlimited confidence. One of those devout friends is ready to receive him into his counting-house ; to accustom him to business habits and lucrative pursuits ; to combat his rebellious disposition ; to keep him industriously occupied from nine in the morning till six in the evening ; to surround him with estimable examples ; and, in short, to share with me the solemn responsibility of managing his whole moral and religious training. Persons who ask me to allow motives of this awfully important nature to be modified in the smallest degree by any considerations connected with his natural disposition (which has been a source of grief to me from his childhood) ; with his bodily gifts of the flesh (which have hitherto only served to keep him from the cultivation of the gifts of the spirit) ; or with his own desires (which I know by bitter experience to be all of the world worldly) ; —persons, I say, who ask me to do any of these things, ask me also to act from a Godless principle

of expediency, and to violate moral rectitude by impiously compounding with vice."

At this point, on most occasions, when his projects for his son were assailed by hostile criticism, Mr. Thorpe cleared his throat, sighed, and looked stedfastly down on the floor—his wife put her handkerchief to her eyes—and his wife's relatives arose in a hurry, and acknowledged the force of the arguments they had just heard, in two words, by saying—"Good morning."

The commercial situation (in a tea-broker's office) which Zack was now appointed to fill, was not expected to fall vacant for six weeks, or more. But he lost his liberty to roam the country from morning to night, on the very day when his place was secured to him. Mr. Thorpe considered it important that he should be drilled in his official exercise during all that remained of his leisure time at home; and resolved on engaging a tutor to instruct him in the art of book-keeping, and fill him brimful of arithmetical knowledge. Zack's natural want of the calculating capacity (he could never be got to learn the multiplication table), and consequent abhorrence of all that related to figures (he used to have his sums done for him at

school by other boys), stimulated him to immediate rebellion against the proposed exercise of his father's authority. Mr. Thorpe said, with his usual brief decision and iron hardness of logic, that arithmetic was necessary to a commercial man—his son was about to become a commercial man—therefore his son must learn arithmetic. Having uttered this short formula, he considered that he had done quite enough to stop a perfect torrent of filial expostulation; and went calmly on with his letter to the arithmetical tutor, informing that gentleman of the first day on which his attendance would be required in Baregrove Square.

But Zack resisted and expostulated anew at every fresh scrape of his father's pen. He had no head for arithmetic (he said), and felt perfect horror at the bare idea of entering a tea-broker's office. Drudgery at a desk, and confinement from morning to night would drive him mad. What had he done to be persecuted in this infamous way? (Here Mr. Thorpe carefully blotted the first page of the letter, and went on to the other side.) Why not let him learn to be a painter, like Mr. Blyth? Did they want to drive him to despair, and make him run away from home, by forcing him

into the employment of all others that he hated the most? (Here Mrs. Thorpe said, "Oh, Zack, dear, hush—pray, pray hush!") It was all very well for mother to say "hush," when father was breaking his heart! Yes, breaking his heart! It was as good as doing that, to keep him from being out in the air and the daylight, working away, sunshine and shower, all jolly and hot, at something or other that he was fit for. Make him anything but a tea-broker—he didn't care what. If he might not be happy learning to sketch out of doors with dear old Valentine, let him be happy in some other line. Send him to a farmer, and let him be a country bumpkin for the rest of his days; pack him off to sea, as a sailor before the mast, if they liked; he could rough it with the best of them. Make a railway stoker of him, and only see how he would feed the engine! Banish him to some butcher's shop; he didn't care, as long as he drove the cart. (Here Mr. Thorpe concluded his letter, and put it into an envelope.) Yes, rather than be shut up in a tea-shop and bullied into book-keeping, he would a thousand times sooner drive a butcher's cart—sooner sweep a crossing—sooner go of errands—sooner be an

omnibus cad. (Mr. Thorpe directed the letter, and put a stamp on it.) They might send the letter; but flesh and blood couldn't stand an arithmetical tutor—he warned them of that! (Mr. Thorpe looked at his watch—rang the bell—then, turning to Zack, said, “Prayers. Take your proper place, sir: and be silent, if you have any sense of common decency.”) “Ah! prayers indeed!” (Here Zack muttered under his breath.) “I'm miserable enough to want praying for more than any other living soul in the whole world!” Mr. Thorpe put his letter on the sideboard, to be taken to the post the first thing in the morning. Mrs. Thorpe stealthily dried her eyes; Zack slunk off into a dark corner; the servants entered. Dead silence at last.

That night Mr Thorpe little imagined how seriously his son was reflecting on the propriety of running away from book-keeping, tea-brokering, and home, the first thing in the morning. For once, Zack had not exaggerated in saying that his aversion to employment in a counting-house amounted to absolute horror. His physical peculiarities, and the habits which they had entailed on him from boyhood, made life in the open air

and the constant use of his hardy thews and sinews a constitutional necessity. He felt—and there was no self-delusion in the feeling—that he should mope and pine, like a wild animal in a cage, under confinement in an office, only varied from morning to evening by commercial walking expeditions of a miserable mile or two in close and crowded streets. These forebodings—to say nothing of his natural yearning towards adventure, change of scene, and exhilarating bodily exertion—would have been sufficient of themselves to have decided him to leave his home, and battle his way through the world (he cared not where or how, so long as he battled it freely), but for one consideration which, bold as he was, unnerved him at heart, and stayed his feet on the brink of a sacred threshold which he dared not pass, perhaps to leave it behind him for ever—the threshold of his mother's door.

Strangely as it expressed itself, and irregularly as it influenced his conduct, Zack's love for his mother was yet, in its own nature, a beautiful and admirable element in his character; full of promise for the future, if his father had been able to discover it, and wise enough to be guided by the

discovery. As to outward expression, the lad's fondness for Mrs. Thorpe was a wild, boisterous, inconsiderate, unsentimental fondness, noisily in harmony with his thoughtless, rattle-pated disposition. It swayed him by fits and starts ; influencing him nobly to patience and forbearance at one time ; abandoning him, to all appearance, at another. But it was genuine ineradicable fondness, nevertheless, however often heedlessness and temptation might overpower the still small voice in which its pure impulses spoke to his conscience, and pleaded with his heart.

Nothing that Zack did was more thoroughly characteristic of him than his manner of testifying his affection for his mother, generally on those occasions when she used to intreat him in private to pay attention to his father's wishes for her sake. Showers of loud hearty kisses, which took away the poor lady's breath ; vigorous, romping embraces, which half frightened, half hurt her, though she would never confess it ; loud-voiced, filial admiration, as ignorant as it was sincere, of all her little favourite and modest ornaments of dress : voluble nursery terms of endearment, so absurd, and at the same time so simply touching,

when uttered by a sturdy son full six feet high, that the mother often laughed and cried in the same breath while she listened to them: these were some among the roughly honest varieties of outward form in which, from time to time, Zack's filial affection delighted to express itself: these were the wonted guarantees (always given with perfect honesty of intention at the time), under which his promises of reformation bound themselves to ripen into performances that should last for ever.

But it was the lad's misfortune to be gifted with more than his due share of the human frailty which, in different proportions, we all inherit from our common mortality. Rarely, very rarely, did the design and the fulfilment correspond, in his case, as they should. Often, however, as the enjoyments of the present misled him into forgetfulness of past engagements, and inattention to future consequences, there were periods in his life when the remembrance of his mother, and of all that he had promised to do for her sake, recurred to his memory, touched his heart, and saved him at the right crisis from the commission of many a fault, the consequences of which might

have proved fatal to him for the rest of his days.

Twice had he set forth to run away from school ; and twice had the loving recollection of his duty to his mother stopped him in full career, and sent him back, a self-convicted deserter, to suffer heroically under the avenging birch. Over and over again, in his wanderings about the country, was he sorely tempted to stay out all night with poachers and gipsies, or to stop for the evening dancing in the booths at a fair ; but the dread of inflicting on his mother the misery of anxiety and suspense which his absence would be sure to cause her, was always powerful enough to turn his truant steps homeward, and bring him back at the appointed hour in the evening, obedient to domestic regulations for her sake.

And, even when severer trials assailed his fortitude ; even when the abhorrent presence of the arithmetical tutor first darkened the doors at Baregrove Square, Zack let Mrs. Thorpe wile him into submission at the eleventh hour. And again, when the place in the tea-broker's office was vacant, if his mother had not coaxed, cried, and persuaded as only a mother could, nothing short

of absolute force (and a very considerable exertion of it, too), would have led him an inch in the hated direction of the office stool. These domestic victories (which Mr. Thorpe complacently attributed entirely to his own firmness), the secret exercise of Mrs. Thorpe's influence effected in spite of every obstacle; but more than this, even her unremitting exertions could not achieve. They could not allure the lad into liking an employment for which he was essentially unfit, and which he secretly loathed and execrated with all his heart. Day by day—even hour by hour—his stored-up hatred of his City occupations accumulated at compound interest. Night after night, as he tossed restlessly on his bed, or lolled out of window, smoking the proscribed cigar, did the familiar and fatal temptation to turn his back unceremoniously on home and home-troubles, increase its seductions, and, treacherously taking advantage of his own sense of the wrong inflicted on him, grow stronger and stronger in the conflict with the one good influence which still strove against it, weakly but resolutely to the very last.

Among other unlucky results of Mr. Thorpe's

conscientious imprisonment of his son in a merchant's office, was the vast increase which Zack's commercial penance produced in his natural appetite for the amusements and dissipations of the town. After nine hours of the most ungrateful daily labour that could well have been inflicted on him, the sight of play-bills and other wayside advertisements of places of public recreation appealed to him every evening, on his way home, with irresistible fascination. Almost in every street that he passed through, with wandering eyes and lounging gait, syren voices sang around him of public gaieties from placarded shop doors and various-papered hoardings : Come, melancholy and discontented youth (murmured the dulcet accents through interstices of red, blue, or green letters of invitation)—Come, and forget the tribulations of the day, the murky realities of commercial life, in our brilliant fairy-land of glitter and gas ! Come, and polk with our nymphs to the music of far-famed bands ; laugh with our swains at Comedy and Farce, and slang in slipshod rhyme, mis-called Burlesque. Come, quaff at gin and water's balmy fount ; fatten delectably on chops and steaks ; toss but some paltry shillings here and

there; and lo! the Hades of your business hours shall change forthwith to Paradise at night!

Such was the constant evensong which murmured companionably to Zack on his homeward way. But, mingling always with those melodious sounds, and striving cruelly to mar their sweetness, there growled, threatening and harsh, a horrent accompanying discord—the voice of relentless prohibition that issued from the paternal lips.

Mr. Thorpe drew the line of demarcation between permissible and forbidden evening recreations at the lecture-rooms of the Royal and Polytechnic Institutions, and the oratorio performances in Exeter Hall. All gates opening on the outer side of the boundary thus laid down, were gates of Vice—gates that no son of his should ever be allowed to pass. The domestic laws which obliged Zack to be home every night at eleven o'clock, and forbade the possession of a latch-key, were directed especially to the purpose of closing up against him the forbidden entrances to theatres and public gardens—places of resort which Mr. Thorpe described, in a strain of devout allegory, as

“Devil’s Houses” and “Labyrinths of National Infamy.” It was perfectly useless to suggest to the father (as some of Zack’s maternal relatives did suggest to him), that the son was originally descended from Eve, and was consequently possessed of an hereditary tendency to pluck at forbidden fruit; that his disposition and age made it next to a certainty, that if he were restrained from enjoying openly the amusements naturally most attractive to him, he would end in enjoying them by stealth; and that the habits of deceit so engendered, would be the habits of all others most likely, by blunting his moral sensibilities, to lead him into abusing the recreations which experience, if not precept, might otherwise teach him how to use. It was quite fruitless to address arguments of this kind to Mr. Thorpe. He answered them all by registering his usual protest against “expediency” and “compounding with vice;” and then drew the reins of discipline tighter than ever, by way of warning off all intrusive hands from attempting to relax them for the future.

Before long, the evil results predicted by the opponents of Mr. Thorpe’s plan for preventing

his son from indulging in public amusements, actually occurred. At first, Zack gratified his taste for the drama, by going to the theatre whenever he felt inclined ; leaving the performances early enough to get home by eleven o'clock, and candidly acknowledging how he had occupied the evening, when the question was asked at breakfast the next morning. This frankness of confession was always rewarded by rebukes, threats, and reiterated prohibitions, administered by Mr. Thorpe with a calm and pitiless severity, an imperially paternal dignity of manner, and a crushing assumption of superiority to every mitigating argument, entreaty, or excuse that his son could urge, which often irritated Zack into answering defiantly, and recklessly repeating his offence. Finding that all menaces and reproofs only ended in making the lad ill-tempered and insubordinate for days together, Mr. Thorpe so far distrusted his own powers of correction as to call in the aid of his prime clerical adviser, the Reverend Aaron Yollop ; under whose ministry he sat, and whose portrait in lithograph hung in the best light on the dining-room wall at Baregrove Square.

Mr. Yollop's interference was at least weighty enough to produce a positive and immediate result; it drove Zack to the very last limits of human endurance. The reverend gentleman's imperturbable self-possession defied the young rebel's utmost powers of irritating reply, no matter how vigorously he might exert them. Once vested with the paternal commission to rebuke, prohibit, and lecture, as the spiritual pastor and master of Mr. Thorpe's disobedient son, Mr. Yollop flourished in his new vocation in exact proportion to the resistance offered to the exercise of his authority. He derived a grim encouragement, he gathered a melancholy fulness of enjoyment from the wildest explosions of Zack's fury at being interfered with by a man who had no claim of relationship over him, and who gloried, professionally, in experimenting on him, as a finely complicated case of spiritual disease. Thrice did Mr. Yollop, in his capacity of a moral surgeon, operate on his patient, and triumph in the responsive yells which his curative exertions elicited. At the fourth visit of attendance, however, every angry symptom of disease suddenly and marvellously disappeared

before the first significant flourish of the clerical knife. Mr. Yollop had triumphed where Mr. Thorpe had failed ! The case which had defied lay treatment had yielded to the parsonic process of cure ; and Zack the rebellious was tamed at last into spending his evenings in decorous dulness at home !

It never occurred to Mr. Yollop to doubt, or to Mr. Thorpe to ascertain, whether the young gentleman really went to bed, after he had retired obediently at the proper hour, to his sleeping room. They saw him come home from business sullenly docile and speechlessly subdued, take his dinner and his book in the evening, and go up stairs quietly, after the house door had been bolted for the night. They saw him thus acknowledge, by every outward proof, that he was crushed into thorough submission ; and the sight satisfied them to their hearts' content. No men are so short-sighted as persecuting men. Both Mr. Thorpe and his coadjutor were persecutors on principle, wherever they encountered opposition ; and both were consequently incapable of looking beyond immediate results. The sad truth was, however, that they had done some-

thing more than discipline the lad. They had fairly worried his native virtues of frankness and fair-dealing out of his heart; they had beaten him back, inch by inch, into the miry refuge of sheer duplicity. Zack was deceiving them both.

His sudden submission to his clerical assailant was not the impulse of the moment, but the result of previous reflection on the best method of silencing his father and getting rid of Mr. Yollop. To attain these ends he was reduced—or, rather, he thought himself reduced—to a choice between two alternatives: flight or dissimulation. He would not have hesitated a moment at adopting the first, but for his mother. She had been more than usually kind, tender, and compassionate towards him (in secret, of course) since the increase of his domestic tribulations; and he could not summon the cruel resolution to leave her by leaving home. The second alternative was all, therefore, that remained; for, at his age, and with his temperament—bound down too, as he was, to an occupation which made the day hateful to him—the idea of ending all his difficulties by paying implicit obedience to orders, and wholly abstaining

for the future from the only evening amusements that procured him a few hours of happiness to compensate for many hours of gloom, presented itself to his mind in the light of a sheer impossibility. The second alternative was accordingly the alternative that he chose ; and once thus decided, he soon hit on a notable plan for enjoying in secret the forbidden diversions of "London life," and at the same time sustaining his good character under the deluded supervision of the Reverend Aaron Yollop.

Eleven o'clock was the family hour for going to bed, at Baregrove Square. Zack's first proceeding on entering his room was to open his window softly, put on an old travelling cap, and light a cigar. It was December weather at that time ; but his swimming practice in the Hampstead ponds rendered him as impervious to cold as a young Polar bear. Having smoked quietly for half an hour, he listened at his door till the silence in Mr. Thorpe's dressing-room below assured him that his father was safe in bed, and invited him to descend on tiptoe, with his boots under his arm, into the hall. Here he placed his candle, with a box of matches by it, on a chair,

and proceeded to open the house door with the noiseless dexterity of a practised burglar—being always careful to facilitate the safe performance of this dangerous operation by keeping lock, bolt, and hinges well oiled. Having secured the key, blown out the candle, and noiselessly closed the door behind him, he left the house, and started for the Haymarket, Covent Garden, or the Strand, a little before midnight—or, in other words, set forth on a nocturnal tour of amusement, just at the time when the doors of respectable places of public recreation, which his father prevented him from attending, were all closed, and the doors of disreputable places all thrown open.

One precaution, and one only, did Zack observe while enjoying the dangerous diversions into which paternal prohibitions, assisted by filial perversity, now thrust him headlong. He took care to keep sober enough to be sure of getting home before the servants had risen, and to be certain of preserving his steadiness of hand and stealthiness of foot, while bolting the door and stealing up stairs for an hour or two of bed. Knowledge of his own perilous weakness of brain, as a drinker, rendered him thus uncharacteristi-

cally temperate and self-restrained, so far as indulgence in strong liquor was concerned. His first glass of grog comforted him ; his second agreeably excited him ; his third (as he knew by former experience) reached his weak point on a sudden, and robbed him treacherously of his sobriety.

Gallantly as he had hitherto resisted its allurements, in the constant temptation to excess offered by this third glass, lurked the great danger of self-betrayal and consequent discovery that lay in ambush for Zack ; waiting to get the better of his frailty as other temptations had got the better of it already. Three or four times a week, for nearly a month, had he now enjoyed his unhallowed nocturnal rambles with perfect impunity ; keeping them secret even from his friend Mr. Blyth, whose toleration, expansive as it was, he well knew would not extend to viewing leniently such offences as haunting night-houses at two in the morning, while his father believed him to be safe in bed. His misconduct, recklessly as he persevered in it, had, however, not yet produced the last, worst result of deteriorating him beyond all chance of refor-

mation. He had still grace enough left to feel ashamed of his own successful duplicity, when he was in his mother's presence.

But circumstances unhappily kept him too much apart from Mrs. Thorpe, and so prevented the natural growth of a good feeling, which flourished only under her influence; and which, had it been suffered to arrive at maturity, might have led to his reform. All day he was at the office, and his irksome life there only inclined him to look forward with malicious triumph to the secret frolic of the night. Then, in the evening, Mr. Thorpe often thought it advisable to harangue him seriously, by way of not letting the reformed rake relapse for want of a little encouraging admonition of the moral sort. Nor was Mr. Yollop at all behindhand in taking similar precautions to secure the new convert permanently, after having once caught him. Every word these two gentlemen spoke only served to harden the lad afresh, and to deaden the reproofing and reclaiming influence of his mother's affectionate looks and confiding words. "I should get nothing by it, even if I could turn over a new leaf," thought Zack, shrewdly and

angrily, when his father or his father's friend favoured him with a little improving advice: "Here they are, worrying away again already at their pattern good boy, to make him a better."

Such was the point at which the Tribulations of Zack had arrived; such the trials he was suffering, and the offences he was committing; and such the doubtful nature of his relations with home, at the period when that sanguine artist, Mr. Valentine Blyth, resolved to set up a domestic Drawing Academy in his wife's room; with the double purpose of amusing his family circle in the evening, and teaching his wild young friend to be steady by teaching him to draw from plaster casts.

CHAPTER III.



A FAMILY DRAWING ACADEMY.

ALTHOUGH the most indolent and easy-minded of men, in dealing with the ordinary occupations and interests of existence, Mr. Blyth was impetuosity itself—a very Hotspur among painters—in all that related to his art. Whatever professional plans he might form, he never rested until he had either thoroughly succeeded, or thoroughly failed in executing them on the spot. If he had been at liberty to consult his own feelings, and to exert himself without reference to others, his morning-dream of a domestic drawing academy would have been realised the same evening, by the establishment of a family school in full working order for the three scholars whom it was alone designed to accommodate—Mrs. Blyth, Madonna, and Zack.

But one great purpose to be achieved by Valentine's project, was the amusement of his invalid wife during the long winter evenings. Lavinia's comfort and convenience were, therefore, to be consulted, as the first and foremost of all considerations. Anxious as she was to witness the establishment of the new academy in her room, it so chanced that the variable influences of Mrs. Blyth's malady on her general health were especially unpropitious to the immediate inauguration of her husband's evening drawing-school. She had her days of weakness and her days of strength; and it was necessary to wait patiently for the latter, before she could be allowed to exert herself in the smallest degree. It was only after a week of delay that a note could be safely dispatched to Baregrove Square, inviting Zack to receive the first of the series of drawing-lessons which Valentine had promised to give him, on the occasion of his last visit to the studio.

When Mr. Blyth rested at last from his labours of collection and arrangement; and, looking gaily around him in "Lavvie's drawing-room," saw that all the preparations for the first evening

of his domestic academy were complete, he was beyond comparison the most innocently proud and genuinely happy man then in existence. And he had ample cause to feel elated, as he viewed the home-prospect surrounding him. Even the veriest stranger must have been morose and miserable indeed, if he could have entered Mrs. Blyth's room without feeling the happier for all that he saw, no matter in what direction his eyes might wander. There was, in truth, but one object visible in the whole range of the apartment which it was not a pleasure to look at—and this was the plaster head which Valentine had incomprehensibly selected, as the best model that his three scholars could draw from. It was a cast taken from the tortured and terrible face of the centre figure, in that grand group of a father and two sons struggling in the folds of an enormous serpent, which we know in these modern days by the title of the "Laocoon."

By throwing down a partition-wall, Mrs. Blyth's room had been so enlarged, as to extend along the whole breadth of one side of the house, measuring from the front to the back garden windows. Considerable as the space was which

had been thus obtained, every part of it from floor to ceiling was occupied by objects of beauty proper to the sphere in which they were placed : some, solid and serviceable, where usefulness was demanded ; others light and elegant, where ornament alone was necessary—and all won gloriously by Valentine's brush ; by the long, loving, unselfish industry of many years. From the airy and glittering little chandelier that lit the room by night, to the glossy leopard-skin rug that shone before the shining fire-place ; from the garden under glass in one recess, to the tender-tinted satin-wood cabinet in another ; from the carpet, whose rich green and brown hues mingled together in sober and perfect harmony of colour, to the cornice with its delicate tracery of vine-leaves and tendrils painted from nature—every object in the room told its mistress the same simple household story of watchful sympathy that never slumbered, and generous affection that never changed ; or wrote on her heart the same touching record of sacrifices gladly undertaken, of trials cheerfully borne, of hard-won rewards gratefully prized, for the one noble purpose of making the sanctuary of the sick chamber a

shrine for the choicest offerings, as well as an altar for the most earnest prayers.

Mrs. Blyth's bed, like everything else that she used in her room, was so arranged as to offer her the most perfect comfort and luxury attainable in her suffering condition. The framework was broad enough to include within its dimensions a couch for day and a bed for night. Her reading easel and work-table could be moved within reach, in whatever position she lay. Immediately above her hung an extraordinary complication of loose cords, which ran through ornamental pulleys of the quaintest kind, fixed at different places in the ceiling, and communicating with the bell, the door, and a pane of glass in the window which opened easily on hinges. These were Valentine's own contrivances for enabling his wife to summon attendance, admit visitors, and regulate the temperature of her room at will, by merely pulling at any one of the loops hanging within reach of her hand, and neatly labelled with ivory tablets, inscribed "Bell," "Door," "Window." The cords comprising this rigging for invalid use were at least five times more numerous than was necessary for

the purpose they were designed to serve ; but Mrs. Blyth would never allow them to be simplified by dexterous hands. Clumsy as their arrangement might appear to others, in her eyes it was without a fault : every useless cord was sacred from the reforming knife, for Valentine's sake.

Looking at her face, as she now lay on the couch side of the bed, talking to her husband, or writing on Madonna's slate, while the deaf and dumb girl sat by her, it was not easy to associate the idea of long confinement and suffering either with her voice, her manner, or her look. Piti- lessly as Disease had set its profaning traces on her face, the expression of her features defied the worst ravages of the Spoiler ; living on in the glad vitality of its own beauty, the one visible portion of her frail life unenfeebled and unchanged. The hollow might be now in her cheek, where the dimple once had been ; the bloom of her complexion and the vivacity of her dark eyes might have died away sadly, as the withering breath of sickness passed over them—but the expression still shone out with a bright happiness of modest courage and deathless hope, which covered as

with a veil of sunshine, all that was now worn and wasted in the tender face.

Imprisoned to one room, as she had now been for years, she had not lost her natural womanly interest in the little occupations and events of household life. From the studio to the kitchen, she managed every day, through channels of communication invented by herself, to find out the latest domestic news ; to be present in spirit at least, if not in body, at family consultations which could not take place in her room ; to know exactly how her husband was getting on down stairs with his pictures ; to rectify in time any omission of which Mr. Blyth or Madonna might be guilty in making the dinner arrangements, or in sending orders to trades-people ; to keep the servants attentive to their work, and to indulge or control them, as the occasion might require. Neither by look nor manner did she betray any of the sullen listlessness or fretful impatience sometimes attendant on long, incurable illness. Her voice, low as its tones were, was always cheerful, and varied musically and pleasantly with her varying thoughts. On her days of weakness, when she suffered much under her malady, she was accus-

tomed to be quite still and quiet, and to keep her room darkened—these being the only signs by which any increase in her disorder could be detected by those about her. She never complained when the bad symptoms came on; and never voluntarily admitted, even on being questioned, that the spine was more painful to her than usual.

She was dressed very prettily for the opening night of the Drawing Academy, wearing a delicate lace cap, and a new silk gown of Valentine's choosing, made full enough to hide the emaciation of her figure. Her husband's love, faithful through all affliction and change to the girlish image of its first worship, still affectionately exacted from her as much attention to the graces and luxuries of dress as she might have bestowed on them of her own accord, in the best and gayest days of youth and health. She had never looked happier and better in any new gown than in that, which Mr. Blyth had insisted on giving her, to commemorate the establishment of the domestic drawing school in her own room.

Seven o'clock had been fixed as the hour at which the business of the academy was to begin.

Always punctual, wherever his professional engagements were concerned, Valentine put the finishing touch to his preparations, as the clock struck; and perching himself gaily on a corner of Mrs. Blyth's couch, surveyed his drawing-boards, his lamps, and his plaster cast from the "Laocoon," with bland artistic triumph.

"Now, Lavvie," said he, "before Zack comes and confuses me (which he's certain to do), I'll just check off all the drawing things one after another, to make sure that nothing's left down stairs in the studio, that ought to be up here."

As her husband said these words, Mrs. Blyth touched Madonna gently on the shoulder. For some little time the girl had been sitting thoughtfully, with her head bent down, her cheek resting on her hand, and a bright smile just parting her lips very prettily. The affliction which separated her from the worlds of hearing and speech—which set her apart among her fellow-creatures, a solitary living being in a sphere of death-silence that others might approach, but might never enter—gave a touching significance to the deep, meditative stillness that often passed over her suddenly, even in the society of her adopted parents, and of friends

who were all talking around her. Sometimes the thoughts by which she was thus absorbed—thoughts only indicated to others by the shadow of their mysterious presence, moving in the expressions that passed over her face—held her long under their influence: sometimes, they seemed to die away in her mind almost as suddenly as they had arisen to life in it. It was one of Valentine's many eccentric fancies that she was not meditating only, at such times as these, but that, deaf and dumb as she was with the creatures of this world, she could talk with the angels, and could hear what the heavenly voices said to her in return.

The moment she was touched on the shoulder, she looked up, and nestled close to her adopted mother; who, passing one arm round her neck, explained to her, by means of the manual signs of the deaf and dumb alphabet, what Valentine was saying at that moment.

Nothing was more characteristic of Mrs. Blyth's warm sympathies and affectionate consideration for Madonna than this little action. The kindest people rarely think it necessary, however well practised in communicating by the fingers with

the deaf, to keep them informed of any ordinary conversation which may be proceeding in their presence. Wise disquisitions, witty sayings, curious stories, are conveyed to their minds by sympathising friends and relatives, as a matter of course ; but the little chatty nothings of everyday talk, which most pleasantly and constantly employ our speaking, and address our hearing faculties, are thought too slight and fugitive in their nature to be worthy of transmission by interpreting fingers or pens, and are consequently seldom or never communicated to the deaf. No deprivation attending their affliction is more severely felt by them than the special deprivation which thus ensues ; and which exiles their sympathies, in a great measure, from all share in the familiar social interests of life around them.

Mrs. Blyth's kind heart, quick intelligence, and devoted affection for her adopted child, had long since impressed it on her, as the first of duties and pleasures, to prevent Madonna from feeling the excluding influences of her calamity, while in the society of others, by keeping her well informed of every one of the many conversations, whether jesting or earnest, that were held in her presence,

in the invalid-room. For years and years past, Mrs. Blyth's nimble fingers had been accustomed to interpret all that was said by her bedside before the deaf and dumb girl, as they were interpreting for her now.

"Just stop me, Lavvie, if I miss anything out, in making sure that I've got all that's wanted for everybody's drawing lesson," said Valentine, looking admiringly at the cast from the "Laocoon," and preparing to reckon up the list of his materials correctly, by placing his right forefinger on his left thumb. "First, there's the head that all my students are to draw from—the glorious Larkoon!" (This was how he pronounced the classical proper name.) "Secondly—"

"But, Valentine dear," interposed Mrs. Blyth, her fingers forming the words round Madonna's neck almost as fast as she spoke them, "why did you choose that dreadful, dying face for us to copy from? My father thinks that all art which only shocks and horrifies those whom it addresses, is art perverted from its right use; and I really can't help agreeing with him when I look at that face; though I know all the time that you must be the best judge."

One of Mrs. Blyth's peculiarities was a habit of constantly referring to her father's opinions and to the prints that he had produced, whenever the conversation ran on art; and, sometimes, even after art had been exchanged for other topics. She was the poor engraver's favourite child, and while he had her at home, was the only member of the family to whom he ventured to confide all his cherished projects, all the hopes and triumphs connected with his pursuit. Like many other shy, nervous, gentle-hearted men born to obscurity, he was secretly ambitious of attaining the noisiest glories of celebrity. His simple yearnings to become famous in his profession, his innocent self-glorification after a good day's work, his pride at seeing his name mentioned now and then in a newspaper, when a print from his graver got critical notice, his own private opinions about great painters, living and dead, were all addressed secretly to his pretty Lavinia. She was the only being in the little world of his daily existence who was ever ready and pleased to hear all the talk about art that was in him, and that he dare not let out to gruff publishers, who made it a favour to employ him—to famous painters

whose valuable time he could not venture to occupy—to his wife, who thought most highly of him as an engraver on the rare occasions when he was ready with her allowance for the weekly bills. Thus Mrs. Blyth grew up from an early age in the affectionate conviction that her father was a neglected genius, and that his unappreciated notions on art were so many great original ideas lost to posterity. She never to the last abandoned her early faith in him, or thought of overcoming the habit she had of vindicating that faith by quoting his opinions incessantly to everybody who visited the house.

“I honour your father’s principles, my love,” said Mr. Blyth, in answer to his wife’s objection; “I honour his principles, and admire his practice.” (Mrs. Blyth looked gratefully towards the wall on which her father’s prints hung, all framed under Valentine’s directions, and arranged by Valentine’s own hands). “I will even go further, Lavvie, and confess that I am delighted to hear you say you think the face of the Larkoon horrifying, for I chose it for the model to-night with the express purpose of horrifying Zack.”

Madonna’s blue eyes opened wide in astonish-

ment, as these words were interpreted to her. Mrs. Blyth smiled at the idea of horrifying such a person as Mr. Zachary Thorpe, junior, with a plaster cast.

“Zack is flighty, inattentive, and so ignorant of art that I doubt even whether he knows I am referring to classical sculpture when I speak to him about the Antique,” pursued Valentine. “Now, when such a student as he is begins to learn to draw, I have no hesitation in saying that unless the Antique crushes him at first sight into a sort of awe-struck submission to art, the Antique won’t get him to study from it with the slightest attention for five minutes together. He wants a model to draw from that will keep him quiet by making him shiver in his shoes the moment he looks at it. The Larkoon in the agonies of death I consider to be just the sort of cast to make a beginner’s flesh creep : therefore, the Larkoon is the very thing we want for Zack.”

“Don’t you think he will find it too difficult for him to copy from at a first lesson?” asked Mrs. Blyth. “My father used always to say that young engravers—but I suppose drawing from the Antique is a different thing,”

“Zack shall find nothing difficult if he will only stick to my instructions,” said Mr. Blyth, confidently. “But he will be here directly, before I have got through checking off all the things I’ve brought from the painting-room. Let me see; where was I when I began? Oh! at the Larkoon. Very good. First, the plaster cast,” said Valentine, beginning once more, and again making a cypher of his left thumb. “Second, two chairs put at the right points of view. The chair with the front view for Madonna; the chair with the profile view for Zack, because it’s the easiest. The three-quarter view, my love, I reserve for you, just as you see it now, because it’s the best, and I want yours to be the best drawing. Fourthly—”

“You haven’t got to thirdly, yet, Valentine dear,” suggested Mrs. Blyth.

“No more I have! Thirdly, of course. Thirdly, the—the what? Do you know, I’m getting a little confused already, almost as if I couldn’t quite make out what I ought to check off next.—Curious, isn’t it?”

“Have you got the port-crayons?” asked Mrs. Blyth.

“To be sure! Thirdly, the port-crayons, of

course. Oh, good gracious ! where *can* I have put the port-crayons ? ” And Mr. Blyth began to hunt for the lost articles, as usual, in the wrong places. Mrs. Blyth made a sign to Madonna, who found them all huddled together behind the cast. “ Thirdly, the port-crayons,” reiterated Valentine, kissing her in triumph, as she presented them to him. “ The port-crayons, and the black and white chalk all cut ready to a point, with a double allowance to Zack, because he’s sure to be breaking his points all the evening. Fourthly, —now I’ve got to fourthly, Lavvie, I feel all right. Stop, though. It oughtn’t to be the lamps ; it ought to be something small and likely to be forgotten. Fourthly, three drawing-boards—no, they’re the biggest things of all. Paper ?—No, it’s stuck on the drawing-boards ; the thickest bit for Zack, because he’s certain to rub out every line he does for the first half hour. Fourthly—Lavvie ! I’ve forgotten something important ; and I don’t in the least know what it is,” exclaimed Mr. Blyth in a lamentable voice, looking all round him in extreme perplexity and dismay.

“ Not the muffins you promised Zack for tea, I hope,” said Mrs. Blyth, laughing.

"Fourthly, muffins!" cried Valentine, briskly — "not that they're forgotten, by any means, for I've ordered in enough to suffocate every soul in the house—but it's a blessing to have something at last that will do for Fourthly, and get one on again to Fifthly. But Fifthly what? There's the difficulty. What *can* I have forgotten? Do try and think, my dear. It's something that everybody wants for drawing."

"Bread-crumb to rub out with," suggested Mrs. Blyth, after a moment's consideration.

"That's it!" exclaimed Valentine, ecstatically. "I've left all the bread-crumb down stairs in the painting-room. No, no! don't trouble Madonna to go after it. She don't know where it is. Tell her to poke the fire instead: I'll be back directly." And Mr. Blyth skipped out of the room as nimbly as if he had been fifteen instead of fifty.

No sooner was Valentine's back turned than Mrs. Blyth's hand was passed under the pretty swan's-down coverlet that lay over her couch, as if in search of something hidden beneath it. In a moment the hand reappeared, holding a chalk drawing very lightly and neatly framed. It was Madonna's copy from the head of the Venus de'

Medici—the same copy which Zack had honoured with his most superlative exaggeration of praise, at his last visit to the studio. She had not since forgotten, or altered her purpose of making him a present of the drawing which he had admired so much. It had been finished with the utmost care and completeness which she could bestow upon it; had been put into a very pretty frame which she had paid for out of her own little savings of pocket-money; and was now hidden under Mrs. Blyth's coverlet, to be drawn forth as a grand surprise for Zack, and for Valentine too, on that very evening.

After looking once or twice backwards and forwards between the copyist and the copy, her pale kind face beaming with the quiet merriment that overspread it, Mrs. Blyth laid down the drawing, and began talking with her fingers to Madonna.

“So you will not even let me tell Valentine who this is a present for?” were the first words which she signed.

The girl was sitting with her back half turned on the drawing; glancing at it quickly from time to time with a strange shyness and indecision, as if the work of her own hands had undergone some

transformation which made her doubt whether she was any longer privileged to look at it. She shook her head in reply to the question just put to her, then moved round suddenly on her chair ; her fingers playing nervously with the fringes of the coverlet at her side.

“ We all like Zack,” proceeded Mrs. Blyth, enjoying the amusement which her womanly instincts extracted from Madonna’s confusion ; “ but you must like him very much, love, to take more pains with this particular drawing than with any drawing you ever did before.”

This time Madonna neither looked up nor moved an inch in her chair, her fingers working more and more nervously amid the fringe ; her treacherous cheeks, neck, and bosom, answered for her.

Mrs. Blyth touched her shoulder gaily, and, after placing the drawing again under the coverlet, made her look up, while signing these words :

“ I shall give the drawing to Zack very soon after he comes in. It is sure to make him happy for the rest of the evening, and fonder of you than ever.”

Madonna’s eyes followed Mrs. Blyth’s fingers

eagerly to the last letter they formed; then rose softly to her face with the same wistful questioning look which they had assumed before Valentine, years and years ago, when he first interfered to protect her in the travelling circus. There was such an irresistible tenderness in the faint smile that wavered about her lips; such a sadness of innocent beauty in her face, now growing a shade paler than it was wont to be, that Mrs. Blyth's expression became serious the instant their eyes met. She drew the girl forward and kissed her. The kiss was returned many times, with a passionate warmth and eagerness remarkably at variance with the usual gentleness of all Madonna's actions. What had changed her thus? Before it was possible to inquire or to think, she had broken away from the kind arms that were round her, and was kneeling with her face hidden in the pillows that lay over the head of the couch.

"I must quiet her directly. I ought to make her feel that this is wrong," said Mrs. Blyth to herself, looking startled and grieved as she withdrew her hand wet with tears, after trying vainly to raise the girl's face from the pillows. "She has been thinking too much lately—too

much about that drawing ; too much, I am afraid, about Zack."

Just at that moment Mr. Blyth opened the door. Feeling the slight shock, as he let it bang to after entering, Madonna instantly started up and ran to the fireplace. Valentine did not notice her when he came in.

He bustled about the neighbourhood of the plaster cast, talking incessantly, arranging his lumps of bread-crumbs by the drawing-boards, and trimming the lamps that lit the model. Mrs. Blyth cast many an anxious look towards the fireplace. After the lapse of a few minutes Madonna turned round and came back to the couch. The traces of tears had almost entirely departed from her face. She made a little appealing gesture that asked Mrs. Blyth to be silent about what had happened while they were alone ; kissed, as a sign that she wished to be forgiven, the hand that was held out to her ; and then sat down quietly again in her accustomed place.

"Fifthly, the bread-crumbs," said Mr. Blyth, proceeding, undaunted by previous failures, with his enumeration of all the materials he had collected upstairs.

“Sixthly, the —— oh, Lord ! it’s no use going on now. There’s Zack.”

As he spoke, a loud voice was heard calling down the kitchen stairs from the hall—adjuring the cook to speak the truth, and say whether muffins had really been ordered for tea. Then followed a long whispering, succeeded by a burst of giggling from the housemaid, who presently ascended to Mrs. Blyth’s room alone, and entered—after a brief explosion of suppressed laughter behind the door—holding out at arm’s length a pair of those puffy wash-leather dumplings, known to the pugilistic world by the name of boxing-gloves.

“If you please, sir,” said the girl, addressing Valentine, and tittering hysterically at every third word, “Master Zack’s down stairs on the landing, and he says you’re to be so kind as put on these things (he’s putting another pair on himself), and give him the pleasure of your company for a few minutes in the painting-room.”

“Come on, Blyth,” cried the voice from the stairs. “I told you I should bring the gloves, and teach you to box, last time I was here, you know. Come on ! I only want to open

your chest by knocking you about a little in the painting-room before we begin to draw."

The servant still held the gloves away from her, at the full stretch of her arm, as if she feared they were yet alive with the pugilistic energies that had been imparted to them by their last wearer. Mrs. Blyth burst out laughing. Valentine followed her example. The housemaid began to look bewildered, and begged to know if her master would be so kind as to take "the things" away from her.

"Did you say, come up-stairs?" continued the voice outside. "All right. I have no objection if Mrs. Blyth hasn't." Here Zack came in with the gloves on, "squarring" on the most approved prize-fighter principles as he advanced. "Put 'em on, Blyth! These are the pills for that sluggish old liver of yours that you're always complaining of. What are you laughing about? Left leg forward—right leg easily bent—steady—and keep your eye on me! Don't talk, but put 'em on. I'll teach you the science of counter-hitting at the first lesson. Splendid system: Owen Swift invented it, and killed ——"

"Hold your tongue!" cried Mr. Blyth, at

last recovering breath enough to assert his dignity as master of the new drawing-school. "Take off those things directly! What do you mean, sir, by coming into my academy, which is devoted to the peaceful arts, in the attitude of a prize-fighter?"

"Don't lose your temper, old fellow," rejoined Zack; "you will never learn to use your fists prettily if you do. Here, Patty, the boxing lesson's put off till to-morrow. Take the gloves up-stairs into your master's dressing-room, and pop them into the drawer where his clean shirts are, because they must be kept nice and dry. Shake hands, Mrs. Blyth, though I *am* such a bad boy; it does one good, ma'am, to see you laugh like that, you look so much the better for it. And how's Madonna? I'm afraid she's been sitting before the fire, and trying to spoil her pretty complexion. Why, what's the matter with her? Poor little darling, her hands are quite cold!"

"Come to your lesson, sir, directly," said Valentine, assuming his most despotic voice, and leading the disorderly student, by the collar, to his appointed place.

“Hullo!” cried Zack, looking at the cast which was designed to impress him at first sight with the majesty of ancient sculpture. “Hullo! the gentleman in plaster’s making a face; I’m afraid he isn’t quite well. I say, Blyth, I don’t want to draw his head. It looks as if it had got a crop of snakes on it, instead of a crop of hair.”

“*Will* you hold your tongue and take up your drawing-board?” cried Mr. Blyth. “Crop of snakes, indeed! Why, you young barbarian, you deserve to be expelled my academy for talking in that way of the glorious Larkoon. Now then; where’s Madonna? Oh, here. No! stop where you are, Zack. I’ll show her her place, and give her the drawing-boards. Wait a minute, Lavinia! Let me prop you up comfortably with the pillows before you begin. There! I never saw a more beautiful effect of light and shade, my dear, than there is on your view of the model. Has everybody got a portcrayon and a bit of bread-crumbs? Yes, everybody has. Order! order! order!” shouted Valentine, suddenly forgetting his assumed dignity in the exultation of the moment. “Mr. Blyth’s drawing-academy for the promotion

of family Art is now open, and all ready for general inspection. Hooray ! ”

“ Hooray ! ” echoed Zack, “ hooray for family Art ! I say, Blyth, which chalk do I begin with ?—the white or the black ? The black—eh ? And, just look here, what part of the what’s-his-name’s face am I to start with ? Ought it to be his eyes, or his nose, or his mouth, or the top of his head, or the bottom of his chin—or what ? ”

“ First sketch in the general form with a light flowing stroke, and without attention to details,” said Mr. Blyth, illustrating these directions by waving his hand gracefully about his own face. “ Then measure with the eye, assisted, occasionally, by the portcrayon, the proportion of the —,—in short, of the parts. Then put dots on the paper ; a dot where his eyebrow comes ; another dot where the tip of his nose comes, and so forth. Then—then, I’ll tell you what, strike it all in boldly—it’s impossible to give you better advice than that—strike it in, Zack ; strike it in boldly ! ”

“ Here goes at the back of his head to begin with,” said Zack, taking one comprehensive and confident look at the Laocoon, and drawing a

huge half circle, with a preliminary flourish of his hand, on the paper. "Oh, confound it, I've broken the chalk!"

"Of course you have," retorted Valentine. "Take another bit; the Academy grants supplementary chalk to ignorant students, who dig their lines on the paper, instead of drawing them. Now, break off a bit of bread-crumbs, and rub out what you have done. 'Buy a penny loaf, and rub it all out,' as Mr. Fuseli once said to me in the Schools of the Royal Academy, when I showed him my first drawing, and was excessively conceited about it."

"I remember," said Mrs. Blyth, "when my father was working at his great plate—which was a dreadfully difficult one—from Mr. Scumble's picture of the 'Fair Gleaner Surprised,' that he used often to say how much harder engraving was than drawing, because you couldn't rub out a false line on copper, like you could on paper. We all thought he never would get that print done, he used to groan over it so in the front drawing-room, where he was then at work. And the publishers paid him infamously, all in bills, which he had to get discounted; and the people who gave

him the money cheated him. My mother said it served him right for being always so imprudent; which I thought very hard on him, and I took his part—so harassed too as he was by the tradespeople at that time.”

“I can feel for him, my love,” said Valentine, pointing a third piece of chalk for Zack. “The tradespeople have harassed *me*; not because I could not pay them certainly, but because I could not add up their bills. Never owe any man enough, Zack, to give him the chance of punishing you for being in his debt, with a sum to do in simple addition. At the time when I had bills (go on with your drawing; you can listen, and draw too), I used, of course, to think it necessary to check the tradespeople, and see that their Total was right. You will hardly believe me, but I don’t remember ever making the sum what the shop made it, on more than about three occasions. And, what was worse, if I tried a second time, I could not even get it to agree with what I had made it myself the first time. The green-grocer’s pence column, I recollect, used to drive me half mad. I was always going to the shops, and insisting that they were

wrong; and always turning out to be wrong myself. I dare say I was sometimes cheated; for I used generally to make the sum I had to pay more than the trades-people made it. Thank Heaven, I've no difficulties of that sort to grapple with now! Everything's paid for the moment it comes in. If the butcher hands a leg of mutton to the cook over the airey railings, the cook hands him back four and nine—or, whatever it is—and takes his bill and receipt. I eat my dinners now, with the blessed conviction that they won't all disagree with me in an arithmetical point of view at the end of the year. What are you stopping and scratching your head for in that way?"

"It's no use," replied Zack, "I've tried it a dozen times, and I find I can't draw a nose."

"Can't!" cried Mr. Blyth, "what do you mean by applying the word 'can't' to any process of art in *my* presence? There, that's the line of the Larkoon's nose. Go over it yourself with this fresh piece of chalk. No; wait a minute. Come here first, and see how Madonna's striking in the nose; the front view of it, remember, which is the most difficult. She

hasn't worked as fast as usual, though. Do you find your view of the model a little too much for you, my love?" continued Valentine, transferring the last words to his fingers, to communicate them to Madonna.

She shook her head in answer. It was not the difficulty of drawing from the cast before her, but the difficulty of drawing at all, which was retarding her progress. Her thoughts would wander to the copy of the Venus de Medici that was hidden under Mrs. Blyth's coverlid; would vibrate between trembling eagerness to see it presented without longer delay, and groundless apprehension that Zack might, after all, not remember it, or not care to have it when it was given to him. And as her thoughts wandered, so her eyes followed them. Now she stole an anxious inquiring look at Mrs. Blyth, to see if her hand was straying towards the hidden drawing. Now she glanced shyly at Zack—only by moments at a time, and only when he was hardest at work with his portcrayon—to assure herself that he was always in the same good humour, and likely to receive her little present kindly, and with some appearance

of being pleased to see what pains she had taken with it. In this way her attention wandered incessantly from her employment; and thus it was that she made so much less progress than usual, and caused Mr. Blyth to suspect that the task he had set her was almost beyond her abilities.

“Splendid beginning, isn’t it?” said Zack, looking over her drawing. “I defy the whole Royal Academy to equal it,” continued the young gentleman, scrawling this uncompromising expression of opinion on the blank space at the bottom of Madonna’s drawing, and signing his name with a magnificent flourish at the end.

His arm touched her shoulder while he wrote. She coloured a little, and glanced at him, playfully affecting to look very proud of his sentence of approval—then hurriedly resumed her drawing as their eyes met. He was sent back to his place by Valentine before he could write anything more. She took some of the bread-crumbs near her to rub out what he had written—hesitated as her hand approached the lines—coloured more deeply than before, and went on with her copy, leaving the letters beneath

it to remain just as young Thorpe had traced them.

“I shall never be able to draw as well as she does,” said Zack, looking at the little he had done with a groan of despair. “The fact is, I don’t think drawing’s my forte. It’s Colour, depend upon it. Only wait till I come to that; and see how I’ll lay on the paint! Didn’t you find drawing infernally difficult, Blyth, when you first began?”

“I find it difficult still, master Zack. I find everything difficult; drawing, and colour, and light, and shade, and tone, and keeping, and perspective, and proportion,” replied Mr. Blyth, with breathless volubility. “Art wouldn’t be the glorious thing it is, if it wasn’t all difficulty from beginning to end; if it didn’t force out all the fine points in a man’s character as soon as he takes to it. It forced out the only two fine points in mine, from the very first. Pluck and Patience surrounding a palette and brushes rampant, have been the motto and coat of arms of V. Blyth, Historical Painter, ever since the tender age of seventeen. Ah, Lavvie, I had some hard trials before I courted you! I’m afraid to

think how many years it took me to get a picture hung up at the Academy exhibition. As for selling anything, that was, of course, too mad an idea to be entertained for a single moment. I remember, however, at one time getting so desperate and aggravated at the awful number of my own unsold pictures which surrounded me (and which were all of one size, being economically painted, year after year, to fit the same frame), that I used to leave my painting-room window wide open when I went out for a walk, in the hope that somebody would just step in from the lane outside, and relieve me of my own works, by stealing a few of them. But that last consolation was denied me. The Academy did not think my pictures worth hanging; the patrons of art did not think them worth buying; and the thieves joined in the general conspiracy to neglect me, and didn't even think them worth stealing."

While Mr. Blyth was uttering these words, and, indeed, on previous occasions, when he was talking most volubly, he was unblushingly engaged in compromising that character for impartiality which, as Master of the new Drawing School, it should have been his constant study

to maintain, by secretly helping one of his pupils to the prejudice of the other two. Mrs. Blyth's hand was weak, and her practice with the pencil had been sadly neglected of late. Without assistance, her drawing would only have taken a middle place between the drawings of Madonna and Zack. But Valentine had determined that it should win the honours of the evening; and, whenever his wife made a mistake, he was always unscrupulously ready to seize the first opportunity of correcting it for her unobserved. If his sarcastic friends, who were always making jokes about his simplicity, could only have observed his method of proceeding now, when Mrs. Blyth got into a difficulty; if they could only have seen how cunningly he waited to help her until Madonna and Zack were particularly hard at work; how stealthily he took her portcrayon out of her hand; how eloquently he began to talk about Art, at the same moment, to avoid a suspicious silence which might induce his younger pupils to look up; how quickly and quietly he executed the necessary alterations, and how dramatically he made comic faces at his wife, indicative of his desire that she should

on no account acknowledge publicly the assistance she had received—if Mr. Blyth's friends could only have seen all this, what a Machiavelli of conjugal politics he must suddenly have appeared to any critical eyes that observed him by Mrs. Blyth's bedside !

“Just eight o'clock,” said Valentine, walking on tiptoe from his wife's drawing to the fireplace, and pretending to be quite absorbed over his watch. “Put down your portcrayons and drawing-boards ; I pronounce the sitting of this Academy to be suspended till after tea.”

“Valentine, dear,” said Mrs. Blyth, smiling mysteriously, as she slipped her hand under the coverlid of the couch, “I can't get Madonna to look at me, and I want her here. Will you oblige me by bringing her to my bedside? ”

“Certainly, my love,” returned Mr. Blyth, obeying the request ; “you have a double claim on my services to night, for you have shown yourself the most promising of my pupils. I felt convinced, Lavvie, from the first, that you would make the best copy from the Larkoon, and you have quite carried out my conviction,” continued Valentine, admiring the drawing which

he had just been touching on, with a bland effrontery that completely upset his wife's gravity. "Come here, Zack, and see what Lavvie has done. The best drawing of the evening—just what I thought it would be—the best drawing of the evening!"

Zack, who had been yawning disconsolately over his own copy, with his fists stuck into his cheeks, and his elbows on his knees, bustled up to the couch directly. As he approached, Madonna tried to get back to her former position at the fire-place, but was prevented by Mrs. Blyth, who kept tight hold of her hand. Just then, Zack fixed his eyes on her, and increased her confusion.

"She looks prettier than ever, to-night, don't she, Mrs. Blyth?" said he, sitting down and yawning again. "I always like her best when her eyes brighten up and look twenty different ways in a minute, just as they're doing now. She may not be so like Raphael's pictures at such times, I dare say" (here he yawned once more); "but for my part—What's she wanting to get away for? And what are you laughing about, Mrs. Blyth? I say, Valentine, there's some joke going on here between the ladies!"

"Do you remember this, Zack?" asked Mrs. Blyth, tightening her hold of Madonna with one hand, and producing the framed drawing of the Venus de' Medici with the other.

"Madonna's copy from my bust of the Venus!" cried Valentine, interposing with his usual readiness, and skipping forward with his accustomed alacrity.

"Madonna's copy from Blyth's bust of the Venus," echoed Zack, coolly; his slippery memory not having preserved the slightest recollection of the drawing at first sight of it.

"Dear me, how nicely it's framed, and how beautifully she has finished it," pursued Valentine, gently patting Madonna's shoulder, in token of his high approval and admiration.

"Very nicely framed, and beautifully finished, as you say, Blyth," glibly repeated Zack, rising from his chair, and looking rather perplexed as he noticed the expression with which Mrs. Blyth was regarding him.

"But who got it framed?" asked Valentine. "She would never have any of her drawings framed before. I don't understand what it all means."

“No more do I,” said Zack, dropping back into his chair in lazy astonishment. “Is it some riddle, Mrs. Blyth? Something about why is Madonna like the Venus de’ Medici, eh? If it is, I object to the riddle, because she’s a deal prettier than any plaster face that ever was made. Your face beats Venus’s hollow,” continued Zack, communicating this bluntly sincere compliment to Madonna by the signs of the Deaf and Dumb Alphabet.

She smiled as she watched the motion of his fingers—perhaps at his mistakes, for he made two in expressing one short sentence of five words; perhaps at the compliment, homely as it was.

“Oh, you men, how dreadfully stupid you are sometimes!” exclaimed Mrs. Blyth. “Why, Valentine, dear, it’s the easiest thing in the world to guess what she has had the drawing framed for. To make it a present to somebody, of course! And, who does she mean to give it to?”

“Ah! who indeed?” interrupted Zack, sliding down cozily in his chair, resting his head on the back rail, and spreading his legs out before him at full stretch.

"I have a great mind to throw the drawing at your head, instead of giving it to you!" cried Mrs. Blyth, losing all patience.

"You don't mean to say the drawing's a present to *me*!" exclaimed Zack, starting from his chair with one huge jump of astonishment.

"You deserve to have your ears well boxed, for not having guessed that it was, long ago!" retorted Mrs. Blyth. "Have you forgotten how you praised that very drawing, when you saw it begun in the studio? Didn't you tell Madonna——?"

"Oh, the dear, good, generous, jolly little soul!" cried Zack, snatching up the drawing from the couch, as the truth burst upon him at last in a flash of conviction. "Tell her on *your* fingers, Mrs. Blyth, how proud I am of my present; I can't do it with mine, because I can't let go of the drawing. Here, look here!—make her look here, and see how I like it!" And Zack hugged the copy of the Venus de' Medici to his waistcoat, by way of showing how highly he prized it.

At this outburst of sentimental pantomime, Madonna raised her head, and glanced at young Thorpe. Her face, downcast, anxious, and averted even from Mrs. Blyth's eyes, during the last few

minutes (as if she had guessed every word that could pain her, out of all that had been said in her presence), now brightened again with pleasure as she looked up—with innocent, childish pleasure, that affected no reserve, dreaded no misconstruction, foreboded no disappointment. Her eyes, turning quickly from Zack, and appealing gaily to Valentine, beamed with triumph when he pointed to the drawing, and smilingly raised his hands in astonishment, as a sign that he had been pleasantly surprised by the presentation of her drawing to his new pupil. Mrs. Blyth felt the hand which she still held in hers, and which had hitherto trembled a little from time to time, grow steady and warm in her grasp; and dropped it. There was no fear that Madonna would now leave the side of the couch and steal away by herself to the fire-place.

“Go on, Mrs. Blyth—you never make mistakes in talking on your fingers, as I always do,—go on, please, and tell her how much I thank her,” continued Zack, holding out the drawing at arm’s length, and looking at it with his head on one side, by way of imitating Valentine’s manner of studying his own pictures. “Tell her I’ll take

such care of it as I never took of anything before in my life. Tell her I'll hang it up in my bedroom, where I can see it every morning as soon as I wake. Have you told her that?—or, stop! shall I write it on her slate? But do just tell her first; not that it's much use, for she understands what I mean (the clever, kind, little darling!) if I only look at her; but just tell her first—Hullo! here comes the tea. Oh, by George, what a glorious lot of muffins! Here, Patty, give us the toasting-fork: I'm going to begin. I never saw such a splendid fire for toasting muffins before in my life! Rum-dum-diddy-iddy-dum-dee, dum-diddy-iddy-dum!” And Zack fell on his knees at the fire-place, humming “Rule Britannia,” and toasting his first muffin in triumph; utterly forgetting, in the new excitement of the moment, that he had left Madonna's drawing lying neglected, with its face downwards, on the end of Mrs. Blyth's couch.

Valentine, who in the innocence of his heart suspected nothing, burst out laughing at this new specimen of Zack's inveterate flightiness. His kind instincts, however, guided his hand at the same moment to the drawing. He took it up

carefully, and placed it on a low bookcase at the opposite side of the room. If any increase had been possible in his wife's affection for him, she would have loved him better than ever at the moment when he performed that one little action.

As her husband removed the drawing, Mrs. Blyth looked at Madonna. The poor girl stood shrinking close to the couch, with her hands clasped tightly together in front of her, and with no trace of their natural lovely colour left on her cheeks. Her eyes followed Valentine listlessly to the bookcase, then turned towards Zack, not reproachfully nor angrily, not even tearfully ; but again with that same look of patient sadness, of gentle resignation to sorrow, which used to mark their expression so tenderly in the days of her bondage among the mountebanks of the travelling circus. So she stood, looking towards the fireplace and the figure kneeling at it, bearing her new disappointment just as she had borne many a former mortification that had tried her sorely while she was yet a little child. How carefully she had laboured at that neglected drawing in the secrecy of her own room ! how happy she had been in anticipating the moment when it would

be given to young Thorpe ; in imagining what he would say on receiving it, and how he would communicate his thanks to her ; in wondering what he would do with it when he got home ; where he would hang it, and whether he would often look at his present after he had got used to seeing it on the wall ! Thoughts such as these had made the moment of presenting that drawing the moment of a great event in her life—and there it was now, placed on one side by other hands than the hands into which it had been given ; laid down carelessly at the mere entrance of a servant with a tea-tray ; neglected for the childish pleasure of kneeling on the hearth-rug, and toasting a muffin at a clear coal-fire !

Mrs. Blyth's generous, impulsive nature, and sensitively-tempered affection for her adopted child, impelled her to take instant and not very merciful notice of Zack's unpardonable thoughtlessness. Her face flushed, her dark eyes sparkled, as she turned quickly on her couch towards the fire-place. But, before she could utter a word, Madonna's hand was on her lips, and Madonna's eyes were fixed with a terrified, imploring expression on her face. The next instant, the

girl's trembling fingers rapidly signed these words:—

“Pray—pray don't say anything ! I would not have you speak to him just now for the world !”

Mrs. Blyth hesitated, and looked towards her husband ; but he was away at the other end of the room, amusing himself professionally by casting the drapery of the window-curtains hither and thither into all sorts of picturesque folds. She looked next at Zack. Just at that moment he was turning his muffin and singing louder than ever. The temptation to startle him out of his provoking gaiety by a good sharp reproof was almost too strong to be resisted ; but Mrs. Blyth forced herself to resist it, nevertheless, for Madonna's sake. She did not, however, communicate with the girl, either by signs or writing, until she had settled herself again in her former position ; then her fingers expressed these sentences of reply :—

“ If you promise not to let his thoughtlessness distress you, my love, I promise not to speak to him about it. Do you agree to that bargain ? If you do, give me a kiss.”

Madonna only paused to repress a sigh that

was just stealing from her, before she gave the required pledge. Her cheeks did not recover their colour, nor her lips the smile that had been playing on them earlier in the evening; but she arranged Mrs. Blyth's pillow even more carefully than usual, before she left the couch, and went away to perform as neatly and prettily as ever her own little household duty of making the tea.

Zack, entirely unconscious of having given pain to one lady, and cause of anger to another, had got on to his second muffin, and had changed his accompanying song from "Rule Britannia" to the "Lass o' Gowrie;" Mrs. Blyth was considering how she could make him see the necessity of atoning for his carelessness, later in the evening, without departing from the promise she had just given; Madonna, with a hand less steady than usual, and with her attention nervously concentrated entirely on the tray before her, was pouring out the tea; Valentine, having left the window-curtains and seated himself at the table, was wondering why she was so pale, and waiting anxiously until she looked up to ask if the room was too hot for her;—when the hollow, ringing sound of rapidly running wheels, penetrated into the room

from the frosty road outside ; advancing nearer and nearer, and then suddenly ceasing, as it seemed, exactly opposite Mr. Blyth's own door.

" Dear me ! — surely that's at our gate," exclaimed Valentine ; " who can be coming to see us so late, on such a cold night as this ? And in a carriage, too ! "

" It's a cab by the rattling of the wheels, and it brings us the 'Lass o' Gowrie,' " sang Zack, ingeniously combining the original text of his song, and the suggestion of a possible visitor, in his concluding words.

" Do leave off singing nonsense out of tune, and let us listen when the door opens," said Mrs. Blyth, glad to seize the slightest opportunity of administering the smallest reproof to Zack.

" Suppose it should be Mr. Gimble come to deal at last for that picture of mine that he has talked of buying so long," exclaimed Valentine.

" Suppose it should be my governor ! " cried Zack, suddenly turning round on his knees with a very blank face. " Or that infernal old Yollop, with his gooseberry eyes and his hands full of tracts. They're both of them quite equal to

coming after me and spoiling my pleasure here, just as they've spoilt it everywhere else."

"Hush!" said Mrs. Blyth. "The visitor has come in, whoever it is. It can't be Mr. Gimble, Valentine; he always runs up two stairs at a time."

"And this is one of the heavy-weights. Not an ounce less than sixteen stone, I should say by the step," remarked Zack, letting his muffin burn while he listened.

"It can't be that tiresome old Lady Bramble-down come to worry you again about altering her picture," said Mrs. Blyth.

"Stop! surely it isn't——" began Valentine. But before he could say another word, the door opened; and, to the utter amazement of everybody but the poor girl whose ear no voice could reach, the servant announced:

"MRS. PECKOVER."

CHAPTER IV.



AN OLD FRIEND.

TIME had lavishly added to Mrs. Peckover's size, but had generously taken little or nothing from her in exchange. Her hair had certainly turned grey since the period when Valentine first met her at the circus; but the good-humoured face beneath was just as lively and hearty to look at now, as ever it had been in former days. Her cheeks had ruddily expanded; her chin had passed from the double to the triple stage of jovial development; any faint traces of a waist which she might formerly have possessed were utterly obliterated; but it was pleasantly evident, to judge only from the manner of her bustling entry into Mrs. Blyth's room, that her active disposition had lost nothing of its early energy, and

could still gaily defy all corporeal obstructions to the very last.

Puffing out abundant fragments of cordial words; nodding and smiling at Mr. and Mrs. Blyth, and Zack, till her vast country bonnet trembled aguishly on her head, the good woman advanced, shaking every moveable object in the room, straight to the tea-table, and enfolded Madonna in her capacious arms. The girl's light figure seemed to disappear in a smothering circumambient mass of bonnet ribbons and unintelligible drapery, as Mrs. Peckover saluted her with a rattling fire of kisses, the report of which was audible above the voluble talking of Mr. Blyth and the boisterous laughter of Zack.

"I'll tell you all about how I came here directly, sir; only I couldn't help saying how-d'ye-do in the old way to little Mary to begin with," said Mrs. Peckover apologetically. It had been found impossible to prevail on her to change the familiar name of "little Mary," which she had pronounced so often and so fondly in past years, for the name which had superseded it in Valentine's house. The truth was, that this worthy creature knew nothing whatever about

Raphael ; and, considering “Madonna” to be an outlandish foreign word intimately connected with Guy Fawkes and the Gunpowder Plot, firmly believed that no respectable Englishwoman of mature age ought to compromise her character by attempting to pronounce it.

“I’ll tell you, sir—I’ll tell you directly why I’ve come to London,” repeated Mrs. Peckover, backing majestically from the tea-table, and rolling round easily on her own axis in the direction of the couch, to ask for the fullest particulars of the state of Mrs. Blyth’s health.

“Much better, my good friend—much better,” was the cheerful answer ; “but now do tell us (we are so glad to see you !) how you came to surprise us all in this way ?”

“Well, ma’am,” began Mrs. Peckover, “it’s a’most as great a surprise to me to be in London, as it is—Be quiet, Young Good-for-Nothing ; I won’t even shake hands with you if you don’t behave yourself !” The last words she addressed to Zack, whose favourite joke it had always been, from the day of their first acquaintance at Valentine’s house, to pretend to be violently in love with her. He was now standing with his

arms wide open, the toasting-fork in one hand and the muffin he had burnt in the other, trying to look languishing, and entreating Mrs. Peckover to give him a kiss.

“ When you know how to toast a muffin properly, p’raps I may give you one,” said she, chuckling as triumphantly over her own small retort as if she had been a professed wit. “ Do, Mr. Blyth, sir, please to keep him quiet, or I shan’t be able to get on with a single word of what I’ve got to say. Well, you see, ma’am, Doctor Joyce——”

“ How is he ?” interrupted Valentine, handing Mrs. Peckover a cup of tea.

“ He’s the best gentleman in the world, sir, but he will have his glass of port after dinner ; and the end of it is, he’s laid up again with the gout.”

“ And Mrs. Joyce ? ”

“ Laid up too, sir—it’s a dreadful sick house at the Rectory—laid up with the inferlenzer.”

“ Have any of the children caught the influenza too ? ” asked Mrs. Blyth. “ I hope not.”

“ No, ma’am, they’re all nicely, except the youngest ; and it’s on account of her—don’t you

remember her, sir, growing so fast, when you was last at the Rectory?—that I'm up in London."

"Is the child ill?" asked Valentine anxiously. "She's such a picturesque little creature, Lavvie! I long to paint her."

"I'm afraid, sir, she's not fit to be put into a picture now," said Mrs. Peckover. "Mrs. Joyce is in sad trouble about her because of one of her shoulders which has growed out somehow. The doctor at Rubbleford don't doubt but what it may be got right again; but he said she ought to be shown to some great London doctor as soon as possible. So, neither her papa nor her mamma being able to take her up to her aunt's house, they trusted her to me. As you know, sir, ever since Doctor Joyce got my husband that situation at Rubbleford, I've been about the Rectory, helping with the children and the housekeeping and all that: and Miss Lucy being used to me, we come along together in the railroad quite pleasant and comfortable. I was glad enough, you may be sure, of the chance of getting here, after not having seen little Mary for so long. So I just left Miss Lucy at her aunt's, where they

were very kind, and wanted me to stop all night. But I told them that, thanks to your goodness, I always had a bed here when I was in London; and I took the cab on, after seeing the little girl safe and comfortable up-stairs. That's the whole story about how I come to surprise you in this way, ma'am—and now I'll finish my tea."

Having got to the bottom of her cup, and to the end of a muffin amorously presented to her by the incorrigible Zack, as a token of his unalterable affection, Mrs. Peckover had leisure to turn again to Madonna; who, having relieved her of her bonnet and shawl, was now sitting close at her side. "I didn't think she was looking quite so well as usual, when I first come in," said Mrs. Peckover, patting the girl's cheek with her chubby fingers; "but she seems to have brightened up again now." (This was true: the sad stillness had left Madonna's face at sight of the friend and mother of her early days.) "Perhaps she's been sticking a little too close to her drawing lately——"

"By the by, talking of drawings, what's become of *my* drawing?" cried Zack, suddenly

recalled for the first time to the remembrance of Madonna's gift.

"Dear me!" pursued Mrs. Peckover, looking towards the three drawing-boards, which had been placed together round the pedestal of the cast; "are all those little Mary's doings? She's cleverer at it, I suppose, by this time, than ever. Ah, Lord! what an old woman I feel, when I think of the many years ago——"

"Come and look at what she has done to-night," interrupted Valentine, taking Mrs. Peckover by the arm, and pressing it very significantly as he glanced at the part of the table where young Thorpe was sitting.

"My drawing—where's my drawing?" repeated Zack. "Who put it away when tea came in? Oh! there it is, all safe on the bookcase."

"I congratulate you, sir, on having succeeded at last in remembering that there *is* such a thing in the world as Madonna's present," said Mrs. Blyth sarcastically.

Zack looked up bewildered from his tea, and asked directly what those words meant.

"Oh, never mind," said Mrs. Blyth in the

same tone, "they're not worth explaining. Did you ever hear of a young gentleman who thought more of a plate of muffins than of a lady's gift? I dare say not! *I* never did. It's too ridiculously improbable to be true, isn't it? There! don't speak to me; I've got a book here that I want to finish. No, it's no use; I shan't say another word."

"What have I done that's wrong?" asked Zack, looking piteously perplexed as he began to suspect that he had committed some unpardonable mistake earlier in the evening. "I know I burnt a muffin; but what has that got to do with Madonna's present to me?" (Mrs. Blyth shook her head; and, opening her book, became quite absorbed over it in a moment.) "Didn't I thank her properly for it? I'm sure I meant to. I should be a beast and a fool if I wasn't grateful and proud at what she's done for me." (Here he stopped; but Mrs. Blyth took no notice of him.) "I suppose I've got myself into some scrape? Make as much fun as you like about it; but tell me what it is. You won't? Then I'll find out all about it from Madonna. She knows, of course; and she'll tell me. Look here, Mrs. Blyth;

I'm not going to get up till she's told me everything." And Zack, with a comic gesture of entreaty, dropped on his knees by Madonna's chair ; preventing her from leaving it, which she tried to do, by taking immediate possession of the slate that hung at her side.

While young Thorpe was scribbling questions, protestations, and extravagances of every kind, in rapid succession, on the slate ; and while Madonna—her face half smiling, half tearful, as she felt that he was looking up at it—was reading what he wrote, trying hard, at first, not to believe in him too easily when he scribbled an explanation, and not to look down on him too leniently when he followed it up by an entreaty ; and ending at last, in defiance of Mrs. Blyth's private signs to the contrary, in forgiving his carelessness, and letting him take her hand again as usual, in token that she was sincere,—while this little scene of the home drama was proceeding at one end of the room, a scene of another kind—a dialogue in mysterious whispers—was in full progress between Mr. Blyth and his visitor from the country, at the other.

Time had in no respect lessened Valentine's

morbid anxiety about the strict concealment of every circumstance attending Mrs. Peckover's first connection with Madonna, and Madonna's mother. The years that had now passed and left him in undisputed possession of his adopted child, had not diminished that excess of caution in keeping secret all the little that was known of her early history, which had even impelled him to pledge Doctor and Mrs. Joyce never to mention in public any particulars of the narrative related at the Rectory. Still he had not got over his first dread that she might one day be traced, claimed, and taken away from him, if that narrative, meagre as it was, should ever be trusted to other ears than those which had originally listened to it. Still he kept the hair bracelet and the handkerchief that had belonged to her mother carefully locked up out of sight in his bureau ; and still he doubted Mrs. Peckover's discretion in the government of her tongue, as he had doubted it in the bygone days when the little girl was first established in his own home.

After making a pretence of showing her the drawings begun that evening, Mr. Blyth artfully

contrived to lead Mrs. Peckover past them into a recess at the extreme end of the room.

“ Well,” he said, speaking in an unnecessarily soft whisper, considering the distance which now separated him from Zack ; and which would have prevented any words he might say in a low tone from being overheard, even by a person who was expressly listening to catch them. “ Well, I suppose you’re quite sure of not having let out anything by chance, since we last met—in the way of gossip with neighbours, you know—about how you first met with our darling girl ? or about her poor mother ? or —— ? ”

“ What, you’re at it again, sir,” interrupted Mrs. Peckover loftily, but dropping her voice in imitation of Mr. Blyth—“ a clever man, too, like you ! Dear, dear me ! how often must I keep on telling you that I’m old enough to be able to hold my tongue ? How much longer are you going to worrit yourself about hiding what nobody’s seeking after ? ”

“ My good soul, you know I always believe you can hold your tongue,” returned Valentine, coaxingly ; “ but, only just now, you were going to talk before young Thorpe there, about old

times, and what you remember of our dear child years ago, if I hadn't interrupted you."

"I wasn't going to talk of nothing of the kind, sir; and I'm surprised you could suspect me of it," answered Mrs. Peckover quickly and positively.

"It was my mistake then, and I beg your pardon." He stopped here, to look at Zack; then, seeing that young Thorpe was too much occupied with Madonna to pay attention to anything else, added:—"And your husband? and Doctor, and Mrs. Joyce? none of them ever say a word about it before other people, of course?"

"Hadn't you better write and ask them, sir?" retorted Mrs. Peckover, sarcastically. "It would be much more satisfactory than depending on a gossiping old woman like me, that can't keep a secret."

"Hush! hush!" said Valentine, taking her hand. "You're not going to be offended with me, I know! We always have our little tiff about this when we meet, don't we? But we never take offence—oh no, never! We are too old friends for that."

Mrs. Peckover smiled perfect acquiescence in

this sentiment, and moved to return to the other end of the room. Mr. Blyth, however, detained her for a few moments ; and seriously, almost sadly, continued :—

“ Whenever I see you, my good friend, I fancy I hear all that melancholy story over again about our darling child, and that poor lost forsaken mother of hers, whose name even we don’t know. I feel, too, when you come and see us, almost more than at other times, how inexpressibly precious the daughter whom you have given to us is to Lavvie and me ; and I think with more dread than I well know how to describe, of the horrible chance, if anything was incautiously said, and carried from mouth to mouth (as it certainly would be) about where you met with her mother, for instance, or what time of the year it was, and so forth—that it might lead, nobody knows how, to some claim being laid to her, by somebody who might be able to prove the right to make it.”

“ Lord, sir ! after all these years, what earthly need have you to be anxious about such things as that ? ”

“ I’m never anxious long, Mrs. Peckover. My good spirits always get the better of every anxiety,

great and small. But, while I don't know that relations of hers—perhaps her vile father himself—may not be still alive, and seeking for her——”

“Bless your heart, Mr. Blyth, none of her relations are alive ; or, if they are, none of them care about her, poor lamb. I'll answer for it.”

“I hope in God you are right,” said Valentine, earnestly. But let us think no more about it now,” he added, resuming his usual manner. “I have asked my regular questions, that I can't help asking whenever I see you ; and you have forgiven me, as usual, for putting them ; and now I am quite satisfied. Take my arm, Mrs. Peckover : I mean to give the students of my new drawing academy a holiday for the rest of the night, in honour of your arrival. What do you say to devoting the evening in the old way to a game at cards ?”

“Just what I was thinking I should like myself, as long as it's only sixpence a game, sir,” said Mrs. Peckover gaily. “I say, young gentleman,” she continued, addressing Zack after Mr. Blyth had left her to look for the cards, “what nonsense are you writing on our darling's slate that puts her all in a flutter, and makes her blush

up to the eyes, when she's only looking at her poor old Peck? Bless her heart! she's just as easily amused now as when she was a child. Give us another kiss, my own little love. You understand what I mean, don't you, though you can't hear me? Ah, dear, dear! when she stands and looks at me with her eyes like that, she's the living image of——”

“Cribbage,” cried Mr. Blyth, knocking a triangular board for three players on the table, and regarding Mrs. Peckover with the most reproachful and rebuking expression that his features could assume.

She felt that the look had been deserved, and approached the card-table rather confusedly, without uttering another word. But for Valentine's second interruption she would have declared before young Thorpe that Madonna was the living image of her mother.

Fortunately, Zack came to her relief during the awkward moment of silence that now ensued. He had gone away to the bookcase while she was speaking, to get his present and show it to her, and was now carrying on his favourite joke while she looked at the drawing,—entreating her not

to be jealous of Madonna, trying to put his arm round her waist, declaring that "Mrs. Peckover" was the name of the only girl he had ever truly loved, and assailing her with so much more boisterous nonsense of the same sort that she recovered her good spirits, and the use of her tongue in self-defence immediately.

"Madonna's going to play, as usual. Will you make a third, Lavvie?" inquired Valentine, shuffling the cards. "It's no use asking Zack; he can't even count yet."

"No, thank you, dear. I shall have quite enough to do in going on with my book, and trying to keep master Mad-Cap in order while you play," replied Mrs. Blyth.

The game began. It was a regular custom, whenever Mrs. Peckover came to Mr. Blyth's house, that cribbage should be played, and that Madonna should take a share in it. This was done, on her part, principally in affectionate remembrance of the old times when she lived under the care of the clown's wife, and when she had learnt cribbage from Mr. Peckover to amuse her, while the frightful accident which had befallen her in the circus was still a recent event. It was

characteristic of the happy peculiarity of her disposition that the days of suffering and affliction, and the after-period of hard tasks in public, with which cards were connected in her case, never seemed to recur to her remembrance painfully when she saw them in later life. The pleasanter associations which belonged to them, and which reminded her of homely kindness that had soothed her in pain, and self-denying affection that had consoled her in sorrow, were the associations instinctively dwelt on by her heart to the exclusion of all others. Valentine's utmost watchfulness never detected a sad look on her face when Mrs. Peckover was in town, and when they were playing the same game at cards that had been first taught her after the calamity which had shattered one of her senses, and fatally suspended the exercise of another.

To Mrs. Blyth's great astonishment, Zack, for full ten minutes, required no keeping in order whatever while the rest were playing at cards. It was the most incredible of human phenomena, but there he certainly was, standing quietly by the fireplace with his present in his hand, actually thinking ! Mrs. Blyth's amazement at this unex-

amplified change in his manner so completely overcame her, that she fairly laid down her book to look at him. He noticed the action, and approached the couch directly.

“That’s right,” said he; “don’t read any more. I want to have a regular good serious consultation with you.”

First a visit from Mrs. Peckover, then a serious consultation with Zack. This is a night of wonders!—thought Mrs. Blyth.

“I’ve made it all right with Madonna,” Zack continued. “She don’t think a bit the worse of me because I went on like a fool about the muffins at tea-time. But that’s not what I want to talk about now: it’s a sort of secret. In the first place——”

“Do you usually mention your secrets in a voice that everybody can hear?” asked Mrs. Blyth, laughing.

“Oh, never mind about that,” he replied, not lowering his tone in the least; “it’s only a secret from Madonna, and we can talk before *her*, poor little soul, just as if she wasn’t in the room. Now this is the thing: she’s made me a present, and I think I ought to show my gratitude by making

her another in return.” (He resumed his ordinary manner as he warmed with the subject, and began to walk up and down the room in his usual flighty fidgetty way.) “Well, I have been thinking what the present ought to be—something pretty, of course. I can’t do her a drawing yet worth a rap; and even if I could——”

“Suppose you come here and sit down, Zack,” interposed Mrs. Blyth. “While you are wandering backwards and forwards in that way before the card-table, you take Madonna’s attention off the game.”

No doubt he did. How could she see him walking about close by her, and carrying her drawing with him wherever he went, as if he prized it too much to be willing to put it down—without feeling gratified in more than one of the innocent little vanities of her sex, without looking after him much too often to be properly alive to the interests of her game?

Zack took Mrs. Blyth’s recommendation, and sat down by her, with his back towards the cribbage players.

“Well, the question is, What present am I to give her?” he went on. “I’ve been twisting and

turning it over in my mind, and the long and the short of it is——”

(“Fifteen two, fifteen four, and a pair’s six,” said Valentine, reckoning up the tricks he had in his hand at that moment.”)

“Did you ever notice that she has a particularly pretty hand and arm?” proceeded Zack somewhat evasively. “I’m rather a judge of these things myself; and of all the other girls I ever saw——”

“Never mind about other girls,” said Mrs. Blyth. “Tell me what you mean to give Madonna.”

(“Two for his heels,” cried Mrs. Peckover, turning up a knave with great glee.)

“I mean to give her a bracelet,” said Zack.

Valentine looked up quickly from the card table.

(“Play, please, sir,” said Mrs. Peckover; “little Mary’s waiting for you.”)

“Well, Zack,” rejoined Mrs. Blyth, “your idea of returning a present only errs on the side of generosity. I should recommend something less costly. Don’t you know that it’s one of Madonna’s oddities not to care about jewelry? She might have bought herself a bracelet long ago, out of

her own savings, if trinkets had been things to tempt her."

"Wait a bit, Mrs. Blyth," said Zack, with an air of considerable self-approbation; "you haven't heard the best of my notion yet: all the pith and marrow of it has got to come. The bracelet I mean to give her is one that she will prize to the day of her death, or she's not the affectionate, warm-hearted girl I take her for. What do you think of a bracelet that reminds her of you and Valentine, and jolly old Peck there—and a little of me, too, which I hope won't make her think the worse of it. I've got a design against all your heads," he continued, imitating the cutting action of a pair of scissors with two of his fingers, and raising his voice in high triumph. "It's a splendid idea: I mean to give Madonna a Hair Bracelet!"

Mrs. Peckover and Mr. Blyth started back in their chairs, and stared at each other as amazedly as if Zack's last words had sprung from a charged battery, and had struck them both at the same moment with a smart electrical shock. On any ordinary occasions, the recollections suggested by what young Thorpe had just said, would not

have been of a nature to impress them lightly, or to be soon forgotten when once aroused ; but on this particular evening, coming after such a conversation as they had held together not half an hour ago, the mere mention of a Hair Bracelet in connection with Madonna had something vaguely ominous in it to both their minds. With one accord they looked from each other to the girl, who was sitting between them, astonished at seeing the game suddenly suspended for no cause that she could possibly discern.

“ Of all the things in the world, how came he ever to think of giving her that ! ” ejaculated Mrs. Peckover under her breath ; her memory reverting, while she spoke, to the mournful day when strangers had searched the body of Madonna’s mother, and had found the Hair Bracelet hidden away in a corner of the dead woman’s pocket.

“ Hush ! let’s go on with the game,” said Valentine. He, too, was thinking of the Hair Bracelet—thinking of it as it now lay locked up in his bureau down stairs, remembering how he would fain have destroyed it years ago, but that his conscience and sense of honour forbade him ; pondering on the fatal discoveries to which, by

bare possibility, it might yet lead, if ever it should fall into strangers' hands.

"A Hair Bracelet," continued Zack, quite unconscious of the effect he was producing on two of the card-players behind him; "and *such* hair, too, as I mean it to be made of?—Why, Madonna will think it more precious than all the diamonds in the world. I defy anybody to have hit on a better idea of the sort of present she's sure to like: it's elegant and appropriate, and all that sort of thing—isn't it?"

"Oh, yes! very nice and pretty indeed," replied Mrs. Blyth, rather absently and confusedly. She knew as much of Madonna's history as her husband did; and was wondering what he would think of the present which young Thorpe proposed giving to their adopted child.

"The thing I want most to know," said Zack, "is what you think would be the best pattern for the bracelet. There will be two kinds of hair in it which can be made into any shape, of course—your hair and Mrs. Peckover's."

("Not a bit of my hair shall go towards the bracelet—not a single bit!") muttered Mrs.

Peckover, who was listening to what was said while she went on playing.

"The difficult hair to bring in will be mine and Valentine's," pursued Zack. "Mine's long enough to be sure; I ought to have got it cut a month ago; but it's so stiff and curly; and Blyth keeps his cropped so short—I don't see what they can do with it (do you?), unless they make rings, or stars, or knobs, or something stumpy in the way of a cross pattern of it."

"The people at the shop will know best," said Mrs. Blyth, resolving to proceed cautiously.

"One thing I'm determined on though, beforehand," cried Zack—"the clasp. The clasp shall be a serpent——"

("which her villain of a father was, I'll answer for it,") whispered Mrs. Peckover to herself, behind the cards; her mind still running on Madonna and Madonna's mother.

"—— a serpent," continued Zack, "with turquoise eyes, and a carbuncle tail, and all our initials scored up somehow on his scales. Won't that be splendid? I should like to surprise Madonna with it this very evening."

("You shall never give it to her, if *I* can help

it,") grumbled Mrs. Peckover, still soliloquising under her breath. ("If anything in the world can bring her ill-luck, it will be a Hair Bracelet!")

These last words were spoken with perfect seriousness; for they were the result of the strongest superstitious conviction.

Beyond the bare knowledge of reading and writing, Mrs. Peckover was entirely uneducated. She had lived for the most part of her life—the early part of it especially—among persons as uninstructed as herself. There was not a popular superstition of the many still preserved among her class which she did not know and believe in—not a superstitious view that could be taken of any remarkable circumstance, which she was not prepared to embrace at a moment's notice. From the time when the Hair Bracelet was found on Madonna's mother, she had persuaded herself—not unnaturally, in the absence of any information to the contrary—that it had been in some way connected with the ruin and shame which had driven its unhappy possessor forth as an outcast to die amongst strangers. To believe, in consequence, that a Hair Bracelet had brought "ill-luck" to the mother, and to derive from that

belief the resulting conviction that a Hair Bracelet would therefore also bring "ill-luck" to the child, was a perfectly direct and inevitable deductive process to Mrs. Peckover's superstitious mind. The motives which had formerly influenced her to forbid her "little Mary" ever to begin anything important on a Friday, or ever to imperil her prosperity by walking under a ladder, were precisely the motives by which she was now actuated in determining to prevent the presentation of young Thorpe's ill-omened gift by every means in her power, short of disclosing the secret that she was bound to preserve.

Although Valentine had only caught a word here and there, to guide him to the subject of Mrs. Peckover's mutterings to herself while the game was going on, he guessed easily enough the general tenor of her thoughts, and suspected that she would ere long begin to talk louder than was at all desirable, if Zack proceeded much further with his present topic of conversation. Accordingly, he took advantage of a pause in the game, and of a relapse into another restless fit of walking about the room on young Thorpe's part, to approach his wife's couch as if he wanted to

find something lying near it, and to whisper to her, "Stop his talking any more about that present to Madonna; I'll tell you why another time."

Mrs. Blyth very readily and easily complied with this injunction, by telling Zack (with perfect truth) that she had been already a little too much excited, considering her weak state, by the events of the evening; and that she must put off all further listening or talking on her part till the next night, when she promised to advise him about the bracelet to the best of her power. He was, however, still too full of his subject to relinquish it easily under no stronger influence than the influence of a polite hint. Having lost one listener in Mrs. Blyth, he boldly tried the experiment, to that lady's great dismay, of inviting two others to replace her, by addressing himself to the players at the card-table.

"I dare say you have heard what I have been talking about to Mrs. Blyth?" he began.

"Lord, master Zack!" said Mrs. Peckover, "do you think we haven't had something else to do here, besides listening to you? There now! don't talk to us, please, till we are done, or you'll

throw us out altogether. Don't, sir, on any account, because we are playing for money—sixpence a game.”

Repelled on both sides, Zack was obliged to give way. He walked off to try and amuse himself at the bookcase. Mrs. Peckover, with a very triumphant air, nodded and winked several times at Valentine across the table; desiring, by these signs, to direct his attention to the fact that she could not only be silent herself when the conversation was in danger of approaching a forbidden subject, but could make other people hold their tongues too.

The room was now perfectly quiet, and the game at cribbage proceeded smoothly enough, but not so pleasantly as usual on other occasions. Valentine did not regain his customary good spirits; and Mrs. Peckover relapsed into whispering discontentedly again to herself—now and then looking towards the bookcase, where young Thorpe was sitting sleepily, with a volume of engravings on his knee. It was, more or less, a relief to everybody when the supper tray came up, and the cards were put away for the night.

Zack becoming quite lively again at the prospect

of a little eating and drinking, tried to return to the dangerous subject of the Hair Bracelet ; addressing himself, on this occasion, directly to Valentine. He was interrupted, however, before he had spoken three words. Mr. Blyth suddenly remembered that he had an important communication of his own to make to young Thorpe.

“Excuse me, Zack,” he said, “I have a bit of news to tell you, which Mrs. Peckover’s arrival drove out of my head ; and which I must mention to you at once, while I have the opportunity. Both my pictures are done—what do you think of that ?—done, and in their frames. I settled the titles yesterday. The classical landscape is to be called ‘The Golden Age,’ which is a pretty poetical sort of name ; and the figure-subject is to be ‘Columbus in Sight of the New World,’ which is, I think, simple, affecting and grand. Wait a minute ! the best of it has yet to come. I am going to show both the pictures in the studio to my friends, and my friends’ friends, as early as Saturday next.”

“You don’t mean it !” exclaimed Zack, “Why it’s only January now ; and you always used to

have your private view at home of your own pictures in April, just before they were sent into the Academy Exhibition."

"Quite right," interposed Valentine, "but I am going to make a change this year. The fact is, I have got a job to do in the provinces, which will take me away at the beginning of the spring—it is not a job worth mentioning; but it will prevent me from having my picture-show at the usual time. So I mean to have it now. The pictures are done and framed, and fit to be seen; and the cards of invitation are coming home from the printer's to-morrow morning. I shall reserve a packet of course for you, when we see you to-morrow night."

"Thank you, old fellow: I'll bring lots of friends. And now, I say, just to go back to what I was talking about a minute ago——"

But Valentine was not to be caught. He had some important additions to make to the invitation list, which accidentally occurred to him just at that moment, and sent him away, with many apologies, to his wife's bedside, to "ask Lavvie for the memorandum-book."

Still obstinate and indefatigable, Zack tried

Mrs. Peckover next; but was immediately repelled with such extraordinary abruptness and asperity that he gave up in despair all hopes of further expounding his favourite idea of the Hair Bracelet for that night; and sought amusement elsewhere, by practising the deaf and dumb alphabet with Madonna.

He was still thus occupied, when the clock on Mrs. Blyth's mantel-piece struck the half hour after ten. Having his own private reasons for continuing to preserve the appearance of perfect obedience to his father's domestic regulations, he rose at once to say good night, in order to insure being home before the house-door was bolted at eleven o'clock. This time he did not forget Madonna's drawing; but, on the contrary, showed such unusual carefulness in tying his pocket-handkerchief over the frame to preserve it from injury as he carried it through the streets, that she could not help—in the fearless innocence of her heart—unreservedly betraying to him, both by look and manner, when he took his leave, how warmly she appreciated his anxiety for the safe preservation of her gift. Never had the bright, kind young face been lovelier in its artless happiness

than it appeared at the moment when she was shaking hands with Zack.

Just as Valentine was about to follow his guest out of the room, Mrs. Blyth called him back, reminding him that he had a cold, and begging him not to expose himself to the wintry night air by going down to the door.

"But the servants must be in bed by this time (they never wait up unless they're told); and somebody ought to fasten the bolts," remonstrated Mr. Blyth. "Never mind about my cold, Lavvie; I shan't hurt if I put on my hat."

"I'll go, sir," said Mrs. Peckover, rising with extraordinary alacrity. "I'll see master Zack out, and do up the door. Bless your heart! it's no trouble to me. I'm always moving about at home from morning to night, to prevent myself from getting fatter. Don't say no, ma'am: I shan't feel at home unless you let me make myself useful. And don't you stir, Mr. Blyth,—unless you are afraid of trusting an old gossip like me alone with any of your visitors."

The last words were intended as a sarcasm, and were whispered into Valentine's ear. He understood the allusion to their private conversation

together easily enough ; and felt that unless he let her have her own way without further contest, he must risk offending an old friend by implying a mistrust of her which would be simply ridiculous, under the circumstances in which they were placed. So, when his wife nodded to him to take advantage of the offer just made, he accepted it forthwith.

“Now I’ll stop his giving her a Hair Bracelet !” thought Mrs. Peckover, as she bustled out after young Thorpe, and closed the room door behind her.

“Wait a bit, young gentleman,” said she, arresting his further progress on the first landing. “Just leave off talking a minute, and let me speak. I’ve got something to say to you. Do you really mean to give her that Hair Bracelet ?”

“Oho ! then you did hear something at the card-table about it, after all ?” said Zack. “Mean ? Of course I mean !”

“And you want to put some of my hair in it ?”

“To be sure I do ! Madonna wouldn’t like it without.”

“Then you had better make up your mind at once to give her some other present ; for not one

bit of my hair shall you have. There now ! what do you think of that ? ”

“ I don’t believe it, my old darling.”

“ It’s true though, I can tell you. Not a hair of my head shall you have.”

“ Why not ? ”

“ Never mind why. I’ve got my own reasons.”

“ Very well : if you come to that, I’ve got my reasons for giving the bracelet ; and I mean to give it. If you won’t let any of your hair be plaited up along with the rest, it’s Madonna you will disappoint—not me.”

Mrs. Peckover began to feel that she must change her tactics, or be defeated.

“ Don’t you be so dreadful obstinate, Master Zack, and I’ll tell you the reason,” she said in an altered tone, leading the way lower down into the passage. “ I don’t want you to give her a Hair Bracelet at all, because I believe it will bring ill-luck to her—there ! ”

Zack burst out laughing. “ Do you call that a reason ? Who ever heard before of a Hair Bracelet being an unlucky gift ? Oh, you mysterious old Peck ! what *are* you driving at ? ”

At this moment, the door of Mrs. Blyth's room opened.

"Anything wrong with the lock?" asked Valentine from above. He was rather surprised at the time that elapsed without his hearing the house-door shut.

"All quite right, sir," said Mrs. Peckover; adding in a whisper to Zack:—"Hush! don't say a word!"

"Don't let him keep you in the cold with his nonsense," said Valentine.

"My nonsense!——" began Zack, indignantly.

"He's going, sir," interrupted Mrs. Peckover. "I shall be upstairs in a moment."

"Come in, dear, pray! You're letting all the cold air into the room," exclaimed the voice of Mrs. Blyth.

The door of the room closed again.

"What the devil *are* you up to?" asked Zack, in extreme bewilderment.

"I only want you to give her some other present," said Mrs. Peckover, in her most wheedling tones. "You may think it all a whim of mine, if you like—I dare say I'm an old fool: but I don't want you to give her a

Hair Bracelet. There's lots of other presents you can choose from instead.—I'd do as much for you, master Zack, if you asked me: I would indeed!"

"Well! I'll be hanged if I don't think one of us two has been making free with the sherry-and-water at supper—and it isn't *me*!" (Mrs. Peckover's cheeks reddened with rising indignation.) "Reasons first, and whims afterwards, eh? *Whims*! Oh, Heavens! to think of a largely-developed woman at your time of life having whims! (The cheeks grew redder still.) "But it won't do; I shall give her the Hair Bracelet—ah, yes, you may look as cross as you like, but I shall! My mind's made up about it; nothing in the world can stop me—except, of course, her having a Hair Bracelet already, which I know she hasn't."

"Oh! you know that, do you, you mischievous imp? Then, for once in a way, you just know wrong!" exclaimed Mrs. Peckover, losing her temper altogether.

"You don't mean to say so? Dear me! how very remarkable, to think of her having a Hair Bracelet already, and of my not knowing it!—

Mrs. Peckover," continued Zack, mimicking the tone and manner of his old clerical enemy, the Reverend Aaron Yollop, "what I am now about to say, grieves me deeply ; but I have a solemn duty to discharge, and in the conscientious performance of that duty, I now unhesitatingly express my conviction that the remark you have just made is—a flam."

"It isn't—Monkey!" returned Mrs. Peckover, her anger fairly boiling over, as she nodded her head vehemently in Zack's face.

Just then, Valentine's step became audible in the room above ; first moving towards the door, then suddenly retreating from it, as if he had been called back.

"I haven't let out what I oughtn't, have I?" thought Mrs. Peckover ; calming down directly, when she heard the movement upstairs.

"Oh, you stick to it, do you?" continued Zack. "It's rather odd, old lady, that Mrs. Blyth shouldn't have told me about this newly-discovered Hair Bracelet of yours, in the course of the evening. But she doesn't know, of course ; and Valentine doesn't know either, I suppose? By

Jove! he's not gone to bed yet; I'll run back, and ask him if Madonna really has got a Hair Bracelet!"

"For God's sake, don't!—don't say a word about it!" exclaimed Mrs. Peckover, turning pale as she thought of possible consequences, and catching young Thorpe by the arm when he tried to pass her in the passage.

"Hullo!" cried Zack, startled into seriousness by the sudden change in her face, "What's the matter now?"

"Don't, there's a dear good fellow!" she continued, in an eager whisper; "don't say a word about it, or you will get me into dreadful trouble, and make mischief with everybody, and set Mr. Blyth thinking all sorts of things, that I wouldn't have him think for the whole world. Don't speak: I know you can't understand it—how should you? Oh, Lord! I wish I hadn't come down-stairs and spoke to you at all! No, no! don't say a word. Of course you can't make out what it all means—can you? But that don't matter—does it? It isn't your business—is it? You haven't got no need to enquire—have you, now? And you won't say a word, or think about

it, or remember it, will you? Hush! hush! he's coming down after us!"

The step up-stairs passed across the room again.

"Well, upon my soul, of all the queer old women!——"

"Hush! he's going to open the door this time; he is indeed!"

"Never mind; I won't say anything," whispered Zack, his natural good-nature prompting him to relieve Mrs. Peckover's distress, the moment he became convinced that it was genuine.

"And, as for my notion of the Hair Bracelet—though I haven't the slightest idea what you have been driving at all this time—I won't do anything in it, till——"

"That's a good chap! that's a dear good chap!" exclaimed Mrs. Peckover, squeezing Zack's hand in a fervour of unbounded gratitude.

The door of Mrs. Blyth's room opened for the second time.

"Isn't he gone yet?" enquired Valentine, in a tone which sounded awfully sharp and suspicious to Mrs. Peckover's guilty ears. He would have asked the question some minutes earlier, but his

attention had been engaged by a discussion with his wife about the advice she should give young Thorpe, when he came to go on with his drawing lesson the next evening, in relation to the present he proposed making to Madonna. They might, however, have saved themselves the trouble of engaging in any consultation on this subject. Zack's course of study in the new Drawing Academy was destined, at the very outset, to meet with a check.

"He's gone, sir; he's gone at last!" said Mrs. Peckover, shutting the house door on the parting guest with inhospitable rapidity, and locking it with elaborate care and extraordinary noise.

"I must manage to make it all safe with master Zack to-morrow night; though I don't believe I have said a single word I oughtn't to say," thought she, slowly ascending the stairs. "But Mr. Blyth makes such fusses, and works himself into such fidgets about the poor thing being traced and taken away from him (which is all stuff and nonsense), that he would be sure to think I'd let out everything, and go half distracted if he knew what I said just now to master

Zack. Not that it's so much what I said to him, as what he made out somehow and said to me. But they're so sharp, these young London chaps—they are so awful sharp ! ”

Here, she stopped on the landing, to recover her breath ; then whispered to herself, as she went on and approached Mr. Blyth's door :—

“ But, one thing I'm determined on ; little Mary shan't have that Hair Bracelet ! ”

* * * * *

Even as Mrs. Peckover walked thinking all the way up-stairs, so did Zack walk wondering all the way home.

What the deuce could this extraordinary botheration about his present to Madonna possibly mean ? Was it not at least clear from the fright old Peck was in, when he talked of asking Blyth whether Madonna really had a Hair Bracelet, that she had told the truth after all, and not a flam ? And was it not even clearer still that she had let out a secret in telling that truth, which Blyth must have ordered her to keep ? Why keep it ? What was there in Madonna's having a Hair Bracelet to make a mystery about ? Who was Madonna ? How was it Blyth would never

tell anybody even so much as where he picked her up? Was this mysterious Hair Bracelet, which he never remembered seeing her wear—and which Mrs. Blyth had said nothing about, while he was actually talking of *his* Hair Bracelet that he had intended to buy!—mixed up somehow with the grand secret about Madonna's origin that Valentine had always kept from everybody? Was not this, upon the whole, very possible? But what did it matter, after all, whether it was or not? What need to bother his head about what didn't concern him? Was it not, considering all things,—and especially remembering the fact, previously forgotten, that he had but fifteen shillings and threepence of disposable money in the world—rather lucky than otherwise that old Peck had taken it into her head to stop him from buying what he hadn't the means of paying for? Would she find some excuse to get him off making his expensive present after what he had said to Mrs. Blyth? What could he buy for Madonna that was pretty, and cheap enough to suit the present state of his pocket? Would she like a thimble? or an almanack? or a pair of cuffs? or a pot of bear's grease?

Here Zack suddenly paused in his mental interrogatories ; for he had arrived within sight of his home in Baregrove Square.

A change passed over his handsome face : he frowned, and his colour deepened, as he looked up at the light in his father's window.

"I'll stop out again to-night, and see life," he muttered doggedly to himself, approaching the door. "The more I'm bullied at home, the oftener I'll go out on the sly."

This rebellious speech was occasioned by the recollection of a domestic scene, which had contributed, early that evening, to swell the list of the Tribulations of Zack ; and which had been produced by his father's disapproval of his accepting an invitation to Valentine's house. Mr. Thorpe (as has been hinted in a former place) had moral objections to Mr. Blyth's profession, and moral doubts on the subject of Mr. Blyth himself. These doubts had been strengthened, though not originated, by the damaging reports occasioned by that gentleman's own refusal to explain away the mystery which enveloped the birth and parentage of his adopted child. Mr. Thorpe knew his duty to his neighbour, and was too anxious

never to judge any man hastily and wrongly, to allow himself to be sensibly biassed by mere report in forming his judgment of Mr. Blyth; but scandal had its wily influence over him as over others; and strengthened, more importantly than he himself suspected, his suspicion that the painter was a person with no fixed principles, and no discernible standard of respectability. As a necessary consequence of this suspicion, he considered Mr. Blyth to be no fit companion for a devout young man; and expressed, severely enough, his unmeasured surprise at finding that his son could exhibit already such “backsliding forgetfulness” of the excellent lessons instilled into him by the Reverend Aaron Yollop, as to wish to accept an invitation to tea from a person of doubtful character. Zack’s rejoinder to his father’s reproof was decisive, if it was nothing else. He denied everything alleged or suggested against his friend’s reputation—lost his temper on being sharply rebuked for the “indecent vehemence” of his language—and left the paternal tea-table in defiance, to go and eat muffins in the doubtful company of Mr. Valentine Blyth.

“Just in time, sir,” said the page, grinning at his young master as he opened the door. “It’s on the stroke of eleven.”

Zack muttered something savage in reply, which it is not perhaps advisable to report. The servant secured the lock and bolts, while he put his hat on the hall table, and lit his bedroom candle.

Rather more than an hour after this time—or, in other words, a little past midnight—the door opened again softly, and Zack appeared on the step equipped for his nocturnal expedition.

He hesitated, as he put the key into the lock from outside, before he closed the door behind him. He had never done this on other occasions ; he could not tell why he did it now. We are mysteries even to ourselves ; and there are times when the Voices of the future that are in us, yet not ours, speak, and make the earthly part of us conscious of their presence. Oftenest our mortal sense feels that they are breaking their dread silence at those supreme moments of existence, when on the choice between two apparently trifling alternatives hangs suspended the whole future of a life. And thus it was

now with the young man who stood on the threshold of his home, doubtful whether he should pursue or abandon the purpose which was then uppermost in his mind. On his choice between the two alternatives of going on, or going back—which the closing of a door would decide—depended the future of his life, and of other lives that were mingled with it.

He waited a minute undecided, for the warning Voices within him were stronger than his own will: he waited, looking up thoughtfully at the starry loveliness of the winter's night—then closed the door behind him as softly as usual—hesitated again at the last step that led on to the pavement—and then fairly set forth from home, walking at a rapid pace through the streets.

He was not in his usual good spirits. He felt no inclination to sing as was his wont, while passing through the fresh, frosty air: and he wondered why it was so.

The Voices were still speaking faintly and more faintly within him. But we must die before we can become immortal as they are; and their language to us in this life is often as an unknown tongue.

BOOK II.

THE SEEKING.

CHAPTER I.

A FIGHT IN THE TEMPLE OF HARMONY.

THE Roman Poet who, writing of Vice, ascribed its influence entirely to the allurements of the fair disguises that it wore, and asserted it to be a monster so hideous by nature that it only needed to be seen to excite the hatred of all mankind, uttered a very plausible moral sentiment, which wants nothing to recommend it to the unqualified admiration of posterity but a slight seasoning of practical truth. Even in the most luxurious days of old Rome, it may very safely be questioned whether Vice could ever afford to disguise itself to win recruits, except from the wealthier classes of the population. But in these

modern times, it may be decidedly asserted as a fact, that Vice, in accomplishing the vast majority of its seductions, uses no disguise at all ; appears impudently in its naked deformity ; and, instead of horrifying all beholders, in accordance with the prediction of the Classical satirist, absolutely attracts a much more numerous congregation of worshippers than has ever yet been brought together by the divinest beauties that Virtue can display for the allurements of mankind.

That famous place of public amusement, known to the loose-living and late-roaming youth of London by the name of the Temple of Harmony, affords, among hosts of other instances which might be cited, a notable example to refute the assertion of the ancient poet by establishing the fact, that Vice is in no danger of being loathed, even when it presents itself to the beholder uncovered by the bare rags and tatters of the flimsiest disguise.

The Temple of Harmony, as its name denotes, was principally devoted to the exhibition of musical talent, and opened at a period of the night when the performances at the Theatres were over. The standing orchestral arrangements

of the place were all comprised in one bad piano ; to which were occasionally added, by way of increasing the attractions, performances on the banjo and guitar. The singers were called "Ladies and Gentlemen." The Temple itself consisted of one long room, with a double row of benches, bearing troughs at their backs for the reception of glasses of liquor. It had a slightly raised stage at the end for the performers ; and its drab-coloured walls pretended to be panelled, but made so bad a pretence of it as to merit no notice, and even to get none.

Innocence itself must have seen at a glance that the Temple of Harmony was an utterly vicious place. Vice never so much as thought of wearing any disguise here. No glimmer of wit played over the foul substance of the songs that were sung, and hid it in dazzle from too close observation. No relic of youth and freshness, no artfully-assumed innocence and vivacity, concealed the squalid, physical deterioration of the worn-out human counterfeits which stood up to sing, and were coarsely painted and padded to look like fine women. Their fellow performers among the men were such sodden-faced blackguards as no

shop-boy who applauded them at night would dare to walk out with in the morning. The place itself had as little of the allurements of elegance and beauty about it, as the people. Here was no bright gilding on the ceiling—no charm of ornament, no comfort of construction even, in the furniture. Here were no viciously-attractive pictures on the walls—no enervating sweet odours in the atmosphere—no contrivances of ventilation to cleanse away the stench of bad tobacco-smoke and brandy-flavoured human breath with which the room reeked all night long. Here, in short, was Vice wholly undisguised; recklessly showing itself to every eye, without the varnish of beauty, without the tinsel of wit, without even so much as the flavour of cleanliness to recommend it. Were all beholders instinctively overcome by horror at the sight? Far from it. The Temple of Harmony was crammed to its last benches every night; and the proprietor filled his pockets from the purses of applauding audiences. For, let Classical moralists say what they may, Vice gathers followers as easily, in modern times, with the mask off, as ever it gathered them in ancient times with the mask on.

It was two o'clock in the morning; and the entertainments in the Temple were fast rising to the climax of harmonic joviality. A favourite comic song had just been sung by a bloated old man with a bald head and a hairy chin. There was a brief lull of repose, before the amusements resumed their noisy progress. Orders for grog and cigars were flying abroad in all directions. Friends were talking at the tops of their voices, and strangers were staring at each other—except at the lower end of the room, where the whole attention of the company was concentrated strangely upon one man.

The person who thus attracted to himself the wandering curiosity of all his neighbours, had come in late; had taken the first vacant place he could find near the door; and had sat there listening and looking about him very quietly. He drank and smoked like the rest of the company; but never applauded, never laughed, never exhibited the slightest symptom of astonishment, or pleasure, or impatience, or disgust; though it was evident, from his manner of entering and giving his orders to the waiters, that he visited the Temple of Harmony that night for the first time.

He was not in mourning, for there was no band round his hat ; but he was dressed nevertheless in a black frock-coat, waistcoat and trousers, and wore black kid gloves. He seemed to be very little at his ease in this costume, moving his limbs, whenever he changed his position, as cautiously and constrainedly as if he had been clothed in gossamer instead of stout black broadcloth, shining with its first new gloss on it. Judging of him in a sitting posture, he did not appear to be a tall man ; but his shoulders were prodigiously broad, and his arms so long as to look out of all proportion to his body. His face was tanned to a perfectly Moorish brown, was scarred in two places by the marks of old wounds, and was overgrown by coarse, iron-grey whiskers, which met under his chin. His eyes were light, and rather large, and seemed to be always quietly, but vigilantly on the watch. Indeed, the whole expression of his face, coarse and heavy as it was in form, was remarkable for its acuteness, for its cool collected penetration, for its habitually observant, passively-watchful look. Any one guessing at his calling from his manner and appearance, would have

set him down immediately as the captain of a merchantman ; and would have been willing to lay any wager that he had been several times round the world.

But it was not his face, or his dress, or his manner, that drew on him the attention of all his neighbours ; it was his head. Under his hat, (which was bran new, like everything else he wore), there appeared, fitting tight round his temples and behind his ears, a black velvet skull-cap. Not a vestige of hair peeped from under it. All round his head, as far as could be seen beneath his hat, which he wore far back over his coat-collar, there was nothing but bare flesh, encircled by a rim of black velvet.

From a great proposal for reform, to a small eccentricity in costume, the English are the most intolerant people in the world, in their reception of anything which presents itself to them under the form of a perfect novelty. Let any man display a new project before the Parliament of England, or a new pair of light-green trousers before the inhabitants of London, let the project proclaim itself as useful to all listening ears, and the trousers eloquently assert

themselves as beautiful to all beholding eyes, the nation will shrink suspiciously, nevertheless, both from the one and the other; will order the first to "lie on the table," and will hoot, laugh, and stare at the second; will, in short, resent either novelty as an unwarrantable intrusion, for no other discernible reason than that people in general are not used to it.

Quietly as the strange man in black had taken his seat in the Temple of Harmony, he and his skull-cap attracted general attention; and our national weakness displayed itself immediately.

Nobody paused to reflect that he probably wore his black velvet head-dress from necessity; nobody gave him credit for having objections to a wig, which might be perfectly sensible and well founded; and nobody, even in this free country, was liberal enough to consider that he had really as much right to put on a skull-cap under his hat if he chose, as any other man present had to put on a shirt under his waist-coat. The audience saw nothing but the novelty in the way of a head-dress which the stranger wore, and they resented it unanimously because it was a novelty. First they expressed this

resentment by staring indignantly at him, then by laughing at him, then by making sarcastic remarks on him. He bore their ridicule with the most perfect and provoking coolness. He did not expostulate, or retort, or look angry, or grow red in the face, or fidget in his seat, or get up to go away. He just sat smoking and drinking as quietly as ever, not taking the slightest notice of any of the dozens of people who were all taking notice of him.

His imperturbability only served to encourage his neighbours to take further liberties with him. One fragile little gentleman, with a spirituous nose and watery eyes, urged on by some women near him, advanced to the stranger's bench, and, expressing his admiration of a skull-cap as a becoming ornamental addition to a hat, announced, with a bow of mock politeness, his ardent desire to feel the quality of the velvet. He stretched out his hand as he spoke, not a word of warning or expostulation being uttered by the victim of the intended insult; but the moment his fingers touched the skull-cap, the strange man, still without speaking, without even removing his cigar from his mouth, very deli-

berately threw all that remained of the glass of hot brandy and water before him in the fragile gentleman's face.

With a scream of pain as the hot liquor flew into his eyes, the miserable little man struck out helplessly with both his fists, and fell down between the benches. A friend who was with him, advanced to avenge his injuries, and was thrown sprawling on the floor. Yells of "Turn him out!" and "Police!" followed; people at the other end of the room jumped up excitably on their seats; the women screamed, the men shouted and swore, glasses were broken, sticks were waved, benches were cracked, and, in one instant, the stranger was assailed by every one of his neighbours who could get near him, on pretence of turning him out.

Just as it seemed a matter of certainty that he must yield to numbers, in spite of his gallant resistance, and be ignominiously hurled out of the door down the flight of stairs that led to it, a tall young gentleman, with a quantity of light curly hair on his hatless head, leapt up on one of the benches at the opposite side of the gangway running down the middle of the room,

and apostrophised the company around him with vehement fistic gesticulation. Alas for the respectabilities of parents with pleasure-loving sons! alas for Mr. Valentine Blyth's idea of teaching his pupil to be steady, by teaching him to draw! This furious young gentleman was no other than Mr. Zachary Thorpe, Junior, of Baregrove Square.

"D—n you all, you cowardly counter-jumping scoundrels!" roared Zack, his eyes aflame with valour, generosity, and gin-and-water. "What do you mean by setting on one man in that way? Hit out, sir—hit out right and left! I saw you insulted; and I'm coming to help you!"

With these words Zack tucked up his cuffs, and jumped into the crowd about him. His height, strength, and science as a boxer carried him triumphantly to the opposite bench. Two or three blows on the ribs, and one on the nose which drew blood plentifully, only served to stimulate his ardour and increase the pugilistic ferocity of his expression. In a minute he was by the side of the man with the skull-cap; and the two were fighting, back to back, amid roars of applause from the audience at the upper end

of the room who were only spectators of the disturbance.

In the meantime the police had been summoned. But the waiters down-stairs, in their anxiety to see a struggle between two men on one side and somewhere about two dozen on the other, had neglected to close the street door. The consequence was, that all the cabmen on the stand outside, and all the vagabond night-idlers in the vagabond neighbourhood of the Temple of Harmony, poured into the narrow passage, and got up an impromptu riot of their own with the waiters who tried, too late, to turn them out. Just as the police were forcing their way through the throng below, Zack and the stranger had fought their way out of the throng above, and had got clear of the room.

On the right of the landing as they approached it, was a door, through which the man with the skull-cap now darted, dragging Zack after him. His temper was just as cool, his quick eye just as vigilant as ever. The key of the door was inside. He locked it, amid a roar of applauding laughter from the people on the staircase, mixed with cries of "Police!" and "Stop 'em in the

Court!" from the waiters. The two then descended a steep flight of stairs at headlong speed, and found themselves in a kitchen, confronting an astonished man-cook and two female servants. Zack knocked the man down before he could use the rolling-pin which he had snatched up on their appearance; while the stranger coolly took a hat that stood on the dresser, and jammed it tight with one smack of his large hand on young Thorpe's bare head. The next moment they were out in a court into which the kitchen opened, and were running at the top of their speed.

The police, on their side, lost no time; but they had to get out of the crowd in the passage and go round the front of the house, before they could arrive at the turning which led into the court from the street. This gave the fugitives a start; and the neighbourhood of alleys, lanes, and by-streets in which their flight immediately involved them, was the neighbourhood of all others to favour their escape. While the springing of rattles and the cries of "Stop thief!" were rending the frosty night air in one direction, Zack and the stranger were walking away quietly.

arm in arm, in the other—young Thorpe adjuring any stray policeman who ran past them to be quick for Heaven's sake, and stop a dreadful row that was going on outside the Temple of Harmony.

The man with the skull-cap had taken the lead hitherto, and he took it still; though, from the manner in which he stared about him at corners of streets, and involved himself and his companion every now and then in blind alleys, it was clear enough that he was quite unfamiliar with the part of the town through which they were now walking. Zack, having treated himself, that night, to his fatal third glass of grog, and having finished half of it before the fight began, was by this time in no condition to care about following any particular path in the great labyrinth of London. He walked on, talking thickly and incessantly to the stranger, who never once answered him. It was of no use to applaud his bravery; to criticise his style of fighting, which was anything but scientific; to express astonishment at his skill in knocking his hat on again, all through the struggle, every time it was knocked off; and to declare admira-

tion of his quickness in taking the cook's hat to cover his companion's bare head, which might have exposed him to suspicion and capture as he passed through the streets. It was of no use to speak on these subjects, or on any others. The imperturbable hero who had not uttered a word all through the fight, was as imperturbable as ever; and would not utter a word after it.

They strayed at last into Fleet Street, and walked to the foot of Ludgate Hill. Here the stranger stopped—glanced towards the open space on the right, where the river ran—gave a great rough gasp of relief and satisfaction—and made directly for Blackfriars bridge. He led Zack, who was still slightly thick in his utterance, and unsteady on his legs, to the parapet wall; let go of his arm there; and looking steadily in his face by the light of the gas-lamp, addressed him, for the first time, in a remarkably grave, deliberate voice, and in these words:—

“Now then, young 'un, suppose you pull a breath, and wipe that bloody nose of yours.”

Zack, instead of resenting this unceremonious manner of speaking to him—which he might

have done, had he been sober—burst into a frantic fit of laughter. The remarkable gravity and composure of the stranger's tone and manner, contrasted with the oddity of the proposition by which he opened the conversation, would have been irresistibly ludicrous even to a man whose faculties were not at all in an intoxicated condition.

While Zack was roaring with laughter till the tears rolled down his cheeks, his odd companion was leaning over the parapet of the bridge, and pulling off his black kid gloves, which had suffered considerably during the progress of the fight. Having rolled them up into a ball, he jerked them contemptuously into the river.

“There goes the first pair of gloves as ever I had on ; and the last as ever I mean to wear,” said he, spreading out his brawny hands to the sharp night breeze.

Young Thorpe heaved a few last expiring gasps of laughter ; then became quiet and serious from sheer exhaustion.

“Go it again,” said the man of the skull-cap ; staring at him as gravely as ever, “I like to hear you.”

"I can't go it again," answered Zack faintly ;
"I'm out of breath. Oh you queer old beggar !
who the devil are you ?"

"I ain't nobody in particular ; and I don't know
as I've got a single friend to care about who I am
in all England," replied the other. "Give us
your hand, young 'un ! In the foreign parts
where I come from, when one man stands by
another as you've stood by me to-night, them
two are brothers together afterwards. You
needn't be a brother to me, if you don't like. I
mean to be a brother to you, whether you like it
or not. My name's Mat. What's yours ?"

"Zack," returned young Thorpe, clapping his
new acquaintance on the back with brotherly
familiarity already. "You're a jolly old boy ;
and I like your way of talking. Where do you
come from, Mat ? And what do you wear that
queer cap under your hat for ?"

"I come from America last," replied Mat,
as grave and deliberate as ever ; "and I wear
this cap because I havn't got no scalp on my
head."

"D—n it ! what do you mean ?" cried Zack,
startled into temporary sobriety, and taking his

hand off his new friend's shoulder as quickly as if he had put it on red-hot iron.

"I always mean what I say," continued Mat, "I've got that much good about me, if I haven't got no more. Me and my scalp parted company years ago. I'm here, on a bridge in London, talking to a young chap of the name of Zack. My scalp's on the top of a high pole in some Indian village, anywhere you like about the Amazon country. If there's any puffs of wind going there, like there is here, it's rattling just now, like a bit of dry parchment; and all the hair on it is flipping about like a horse's tail when the flies is in season. I don't know nothing more about my scalp than that. If you don't believe me, just lay holt of my hat, and I'll show you—"

"Oh, hang it, no!" exclaimed Zack, recoiling from the offered hat. "I believe you, old fellow. But how the deuce do you manage without a scalp—I never heard of such a thing before in my life—how is it you're not dead, eh?"

"It takes a deal more to kill a tough man than you London chaps think," said Mat. "I was found before my head got cool, and plastered over

with leaves and ointment. They'd left a bit of scalp at the back, being in rather too great a hurry to do their work as handily as usual; and a new skin grewed over, after a little, a babyish sort of skin that wasn't half thick enough, and wouldn't bear no new crop of hair. So I had to eke out and keep my head comfortable with an old yellow handkercher; which I always wore till I got to San Francisco, on my way back here. I met with a priest at San Francisco, who told me that I should look a little less like a savage, if I wore a skull-cap like his, instead of a handkercher, when I got back into what he called the civilised world. So I took his advice, and bought this cap. I suppose it looks better than my old yellow handkercher; but it ain't half so comfortable."

"But how did you lose your scalp?" asked Zack—"tell us all about it. Upon my soul, Mat, you seem to be the most interesting fellow I ever met with! And, I say, let's walk about, while we talk. I feel steadier on my legs now; and it's so infernally cold standing here."

"Which way can we soonest get out of this muck of houses and streets?" asked Mat,

surveying the London view around him with an expression of grim disgust. "There ain't no room, even on this bridge, for the wind to blow fairly over a man. I'd just as soon be smothered up in a bed, as smothered up in smoke and stink here."

"What a queer fellow you are!—a regular character. Come along, this way. Steady, old boy! The grog's not quite out of my head yet; and I've got the hiccups. Here's my way home, and your way into the fresh air, if you really want it. Come along; and tell me how you lost your scalp."

"There aint nothing particular to tell. What's your name again?"

"Zack."

"Well, Zack, I was out on the tramp, dodging about after any game that turned up, on the banks of the Amazon—"

"Amazon? What the devil's that? A woman? or a place?—Steady! or that cab will be over us."

"Did you ever hear of South America?"

"I can't positively swear to it; but to the best of my belief, I think I have."

"Well; Amazon's a longish bit of a river in

those parts. I was out, as I told you, on the tramp—”

“By Jove! you look like the sort of man who has been out on the tramp everywhere.”

“Do I?”

“And done everything, I should say.”

“Mostly everything. I’ve druv’ cattle in Mexico; I’ve been out with a gang that went to find an overland road to the North Pole; I’ve worked through a season or two in catching wild horses in the Pampas; and another season or two in digging gold in California. I went away from England, a tidy lad aboard ship; and here I am back again now, an old vagabond as hasn’t a friend to own him. If you want to know exactly who I am, and what I’ve been up to all my life, that’s about as much as I can tell you.”

“And deucedly interesting it is too! But I say—oh, these infernal hiccups! I’m always bothered with them at night after eating supper. I’ve been a martyr to hiccups ever since I was a child—but, I say, there’s one thing you haven’t told me yet; you haven’t told me what your other name is besides Mat. Mine’s Thorpe.”

“I haven’t heard the sound of the other name

you're asking after, for a matter of better than twenty year: and I don't care if I never hear it again." His voice sank huskily, and he turned his head a little away from Zack, as he said those words. "They nicknamed me 'Marksman,' when I used to go out with the exploring gangs, because I was the best shot of all of them. *You* call me Marksman too, if you don't like Mat. Mister Matthew Marksman, if you please: everybody seems to be a 'Mister' here. You're one, of course. But I don't mean to call you 'Mister' for all that. I shall stick to Zack; it's short, and there's no bother about it."

"All right, old fellow! And I'll stick to Mat, which is shorter still by a whole letter. But, I say, you haven't told the story yet about how you lost your scalp."

"There ain't no story in it. Do you know what it is to have a man dodging after you through these odds and ends of streets here? I dare say you do. Well, I had three skulking thieves of Indians dodging after me, over better than four hundred miles of lonesome country, where I might have bawled for help for a whole week on end, and never made anybody hear me.

They wanted my scalp, and they wanted my rifle, and they got both at last, at the end of their man-hunt, because I couldn't get any sleep."

"Not get any sleep! Why not?"

"Because they was three, and I was only one, to be sure! One of them kep' watch while the other two slept. I hadn't nobody to keep watch for me; and my life depended on my eyes being open night and day. I took a dog's snooze once, and was woke out of it by an arrow in my face. I kep' on a long time after that, before I give out; but at last I got the horrors, and thought the prairie was all a-fire, and run from it. I don't know how long I run on in that mad state; I only know that the horrors turned out to be the saving of my life. I missed my own trail, and struck into another, which was a trail of friendly Indians—people I'd traded with, you know. And I come up with 'em somehow, near enough for the stragglers of their hunting-party to hear me skreek when my scalp was took. And now you know as much about it as I do; for I can't tell you no more, except that I woke up like, in an Indian wigwam, with a crop of cool leaves on my head, instead of a crop of hair."

“By George, how horrible! (It’s tremendously exciting though.) Which of those scars on your face is the arrow-wound, eh? Oh, that’s it—is it? Hullo! old boy, you’ve got a black eye. Did any of those fellows hit hard enough to hurt you in that row of ours?”

“Hurt me! Chaps like them *hurt Me!*!”—and Mr. Marksman, tickled by the extravagance of the idea which Zack’s question suggested to him, shook his sturdy shoulders, and indulged himself in a gruff chuckle which seemed to claim some sort of barbarous relationship with a laugh.

“Ah! of course they haven’t hurt you;—I didn’t think they had,” said Zack, whose pugilistic sympathies were deeply touched by the contempt with which his new friend treated the bumps and bruises received in the fight. “Go on, Mat, I like adventures of your sort. What did you do after your head healed up?”

“Well, I got tired of dodging about the Amazon, and went south, and learnt to throw a lasso, and took a turn at the wild horses. Galloping did my head good.”

“It’s just what would do mine good too. Yours is the sort of jolly, wandering life, Mat,

for me! How did you first come to lead it? Did you run away from home?"

"No. I served aboard ship, where I was put out, being too idle a vagabond to be kep' at home. I always wanted to run wild somewheres for a change; but I didn't really go to do it, till I picked up a letter which was waiting for me in port, at the Brazils. There was news in that which sickened me of going home again; so I deserted, and went off on the tramp. And I've been mostly on the tramp ever since, till I got here last Sunday."

"What! have you only been in England since Sunday?"

"That's all. I made a good time of it in California, where I've been last, digging gold. My mate, as was with me, got a talking about the old country, and wrought on me so that I went back with him to see it again. So, instead of gambling away all my money over there" (Mr. Marksman carelessly jerked his hand in a westerly direction), "I've come to spend it over here. I'm going down into the country to-morrow, to see if anybody cares to own me at the old place. If nobody does, I shall go back again at once."

After twenty year among the savages, or little better, I ain't fit for the sort of thing as goes on among you here. I can't sleep in a bed; I can't stop in a room; I can't be comfortable in decent clothes; I can't stray into a singing-shop, as I did to-night, without a dust being kicked up all round me, because I havn't got a proper head of hair like everybody else. I can't shake up along with the rest of you, nohow; I'm used to hard lines and a wild country; and I shall go back and die over there among the lonesome places where there's plenty of room for me." And again Mr. Marksman jerked his hand carelessly in the direction of the American continent.

"Oh, don't talk about going back, old fellow!" cried Zack; "you must have such lots of good stories to tell, and I want to hear them all. There's nothing I should like better than bolting to America myself. It's no use going back the moment you've got here, before I've had time to know you. Besides, you're sure to find somebody left at home—don't you think so yourself, Mat?"

Mat made no answer. He suddenly slackened; then, as suddenly, increased his pace; dragging young Thorpe with him at a headlong rate.

“You’re sure to find somebody,” continued Zack, in his off-hand, familiar way. “I don’t know—gently, Mat! we’re not walking for a wager—I don’t know whether you’re married or not?” (Mr. Marksman still made no answer, and walked quicker than ever). “But if you haven’t got wife or child, every fellow’s got a father and mother, you know; and most fellows have got brothers or sisters; and even if—”

“Good night,” said Mr. Marksman, stopping short, and abruptly holding out his hand.

“Why! what’s the matter now?” asked Zack, in astonishment. “What do you want to part company for already? We are not near the end of the streets yet. I havn’t said anything that’s offended you?”

“No, nothing. You can go on talking to me, if you like, the day after to-morrow. I shall be back then, whatever happens. I said I’d be like a brother to you; and that means, in my lingo, doing anything you ask. You want me to tell you about the sort of life I’ve been leading—do you? Very well; I’ll tell you as much as you want. There’s a baccer shop in Kirk Street, Wendover Market, with a green door, and

Fourteen written on it in yaller paint. When I *am* shut up in a room of my own, which isn't often, I'm shut up there. I can't give you the key of the house, because I want it myself."

"Kirk Street? That's my way. Why can't we go on together? What do you want to say good-night here for?"

"Because I want to be left by myself. It ain't your fault; but you've set me thinking of something that don't make me easy in my mind. I've led a lonesome life of it, young 'un; straying away months and months out in the wilderness, without a human being to speak to. I dare say that wasn't a right sort of life for a man to take up with; but I *did* take up with it; and I can't get over liking it sometimes still. When I'm not easy in my mind, I want to be left lonesome as I used to be. I want it now." And once more, Mr. Marksman held out his hand.

"Well, Mat, you certainly are the most curious fellow I ever met with. Wait a bit, old boy, till I've written down your direction in my pocket-book. Hang the thing! I can't get at it. What number was it—eh? Oh! Fourteen. Wait a minute. 'Mr. Marksman (that's the name to

ask for, isn't it?') All right. 'Mr. Marksman, 14, Kirk Street, Wendover Market.' What's the day after to-morrow? Thursday? 'Wendover Market: Thursday.' Morning, early, shall I write? Very well: 'Morning, early.' And, Mat, if you really don't find anybody that belongs to you—"

"Good-night," repeated Mr. Marksman, crossing suddenly to the other side of the road, and then walking straight on at a great pace.

Young Thorpe stood with his pocket-book and pencil in his hand, looking after his new friend until he had lost sight of him in the dark distance dotted with gas-lights; and had heard the last thump of his steady footstep die away on the pavement in the morning stillness of the street.

That's a queer fellow—thought Zack, as he pursued his own road — and we have got acquainted with each other in a very queer way. I shall go and see him though, on Thursday; for, if ever I'm turned loose on the world (which isn't at all unlikely, considering how badly things are going on with me at home), he's just the man to give me a hint or two in the right direction. I shall certainly go and see him on

Thursday; something may come of it, one of these days.

Zack was a careless guesser; but, in this case, he guessed right. Something *did* come of it.

CHAPTER II.

THE PRODIGAL'S RETURN.

WHEN Zack reached Baregrove Square, it was four in the morning. The neighbouring church clock struck the hour as he approached his own door.

Immediately after parting with Mr. Marksman malicious Fate so ordained it that he passed one of those late—or, to speak more correctly, early—public-houses, which are open to customers during the “small hours” of the morning. He was parched with thirst; and the hiccuping fit which had seized him in the company of his new friend had not yet subsided. “Suppose I try what a drop of brandy will do for me,” exclaimed Zack, stopping at the fatal entrance of the public-house.

He went in lightly and easily enough. He came out with some awkwardness, and no little

difficulty. However, he had achieved his purpose of curing the hiccups. The remedy employed, acted, to be sure, on his legs as well as his stomach—but that was a trifling physiological eccentricity quite unworthy of notice.

He was far too exclusively occupied in thinking of the eccentric Mr. Marksman, and in chuckling over the remembrance of the agreeably riotous train of circumstances which had brought his new acquaintance and himself together, to take any notice of his own personal condition, or to observe that his course over the pavement was of a somewhat sinuous nature, as he walked home. It was only when he pulled the door-key out of his pocket, and tried to put it into the key-hole, that his attention was fairly directed on himself; and then he discovered that his hands were slightly helpless, and that he was also by no means rigidly steady on his legs.

There are some men whose minds get drunk, and some men whose bodies get drunk, under the influence of intoxicating liquor. Zack belonged to the second class. He was perfectly capable of understanding what was said to him, and of knowing what he said himself, long after his

utterance had grown thick, and his gait had become perilously uncertain. He was now quite conscious that his visit to the public-house had by no means tended to sober him; and quite awake to the importance of noiselessly stealing up to bed—but he was, at the same time, totally unable to put the key into the door at the first attempt, or to look comfortably for the key-hole, without previously leaning against the area railings at his side.

“Steady,” muttered Zack, “I’m done for if I make any row.” Here he felt for the keyhole, and guided the key elaborately with his left hand, into its proper place. He next opened the door, so quietly that he was astonished at himself—entered the passage with marvellous stealthiness—then closed the door again, and cried “Hush!” when he found that he had let the lock go a little too noisily.

He listened before he attempted to light his candle. The air of the house felt strangely close and hot, after the air out of doors. The dark stillness above and around him was instinct with an awful and virtuous repose; and was deepened ominously by the solemn *tick-tick* of the kitchen

clock—never audible from the passage in the day time: terribly and incomprehensibly distinct at this moment.

“I won’t bolt the door,” he whispered to himself, “till I have struck a —” Here the unreliability of brandy as a curative agent in cases of fermentation in the stomach, was palpably demonstrated by the return of the hiccuping fit. “Hush!” cried Zack for the second time; terrified at the violence and suddenness of the relapse, and clapping his hand to his mouth when it was too late.

After groping, on his knees, with extraordinary perseverance all round the rim of his bed-room candlestick, which stood on one of the hall chairs, he succeeded—not in finding the box of matches—but in knocking it inexplicably off the chair, and sending it rolling over the stone floor, until it was stopped by the opposite wall. With some difficulty he captured it, and struck a light. Never, in all Zack’s experience, had any former matches caught flame with such a shrill report, as was produced from the one disastrous and diabolical match which he happened to select to light his candle with.

The next thing to be done was to bolt the door. He succeeded very well with the bolt at the top ; but failed signally with the bolt at the bottom, which appeared particularly difficult to deal with that night ; for it first of all creaked fiercely on being moved—then stuck spitefully just at the entrance of the staple—then slipped all of a sudden, under moderate pressure, and ran like lightning into its appointed place, with a bang of malicious triumph. If that don't bring the governor down—thought Zack, listening with all his ears, and stifling the hiccups with all his might—he's a harder sleeper than I take him for.

But no door opened, no voice called, no sound of any kind broke the mysterious stillness of the bedroom regions. Zack sat down on the stairs, and took his boots off—got up again with some little difficulty, listened, took his candlestick, listened once more, whispered to himself, "Now for it !" and began the perilous ascent to his own room.

He held tight by the bannisters, only falling against them, and making them crack from top to bottom, once, before he reached the drawing-room landing. He ascended the second flight of

stairs without casualties of any kind, until he got to the top step, close by his father's bed-room door. Here, by a dire fatality, the stifled hiccups burst beyond all control; and distinctly asserted themselves by one convulsive yelp, which betrayed Zack into a start of horror. The start shook his candlestick: the extinguisher, which lay loose in it, dropped out, hopped playfully down the stone-stairs, and rolled over the landing with a loud and lively ring—a devilish and brazen flourish of exultation in honour of its own activity.

“Oh Lord!” faintly ejaculated Zack, as he heard somebody's voice speaking, and somebody's body moving, in the bed-room; and remembered that he had to mount another flight of stairs—wooden stairs, this time—before he got to his own quarters on the garret-floor.

He went up, however, directly, with the recklessness of despair; every separate stair creaking and cracking under him, as if a young elephant had been retiring to bed instead of a young man. He blew out his light, tore off his clothes, and, slipping between the sheets, began to breathe elaborately, as if he was fast asleep—in the desperate hope of being still able to deceive his

father, if Mr. Thorpe came up stairs to look after him.

But another and a last accident, the direst of all, baffled his plans and ruthlessly betrayed him. No sooner had he assumed a recumbent position than a lusty and ceaseless singing began in his ears, which bewildered and half deafened him. His bed, the room, the house, the whole world tore round and round, and heaved up and down frantically with him. He ceased to be a human being: he became a giddy atom, spinning drunkenly in illimitable space. He started up in bed, and was recalled to a sense of his humanity by a cold perspiration and a deathly qualm. Hiccups burst from him no longer; but they were succeeded by another and a louder series of sounds—sounds familiar to everybody who has ever been at sea—sounds nautically and lamentably associated with white basins, whirling waves, and misery of mortal stomachs wailing in emetic despair.

In the momentary pauses between the rapidly successive attacks of the malady which now overwhelmed him, and which he attributed in after life entirely to the dyspeptic influences of toasted

cheese, Zack was faintly conscious of the sound of slippered feet ascending the stairs. His back was to the door. He had no strength to move, no courage to look round, no voice to raise in supplication. He knew that his door opened—that a light came into the room—that a voice cried “Degraded beast!”—that the door was suddenly shut again with a bang—and that he was left once more in total darkness. He did not care for the light, or the voice, or the banging of the door: he did not think of them afterwards, he did not mourn over the past, or speculate on the future. He just sank back on his pillow with a gasp, drew the clothes over him with a groan, and fell asleep, blissfully reckless of the retribution that was to come with the coming daylight.

When he woke late the next morning—conscious of nothing, at first, except that it was thawing fast out of doors, and that he had a violent headache, but gradually recalled to a remembrance of the memorable fight in the Temple of Harmony by a sense of soreness in his ribs, and a growing conviction that his nose had become too large for his face—Zack’s memory began, correctly though confusedly, to retrace the

circumstances attending his return home, and his disastrous journey up stairs to bed. With these recollections were mingled others of the light that had penetrated into his room, after his own candle was out; of the voice that had denounced him as a "Degraded Beast;" and of the banging of the door which had followed. There could be no doubt that it was his father who had entered the room and apostrophised him in the briefly emphatic terms which he was now calling to mind. Never had Mr. Thorpe, on any former occasion, been known to call names, or bang doors. It was quite clear that he had discovered everything; and was exasperated with his son as he had never been exasperated with any other human being before in his life.

Just as Zack arrived at this conclusion, he heard the rustling of his mother's dress on the stairs, and Mrs. Thorpe, with her handkerchief to her eyes, presented herself wofully at his bedside. Profoundly and penitently wretched, he tried to gain his mother's forgiveness before he encountered his father's wrath. To do him justice, he was so thoroughly ashamed to meet her eye, that he turned his face to the wall,

and in that position confessed everything, vowed amendment for the future and for ever, declared his readiness to make any atonement that was desired of him ; and, in short, appealed to his mother's compassion in the most moving terms, and with the most vehement protestations that he had ever addressed to her.

But the only effect he produced on Mrs. Thorpe was to make her walk up and down the room in violent agitation, sobbing bitterly. Now and then, a few words burst lamentably and incoherently from her lips. They were just articulate enough for him to gather from them, that his father had found out everything, had suffered in consequence from an attack of palpitations of the heart, and had felt himself, on rising that morning, so unequal, both in mind and body, to deal unaided with the enormity of his son's offence, that he had just gone out to seek Mr. Yollop's advice as to what it would be best for him to do, as a Christian and a parent, under the shocking and shameful emergency in which he was now placed.

On discovering this, Zack's penitence changed instantly into a curious mixture of indignation

and alarm. He turned round quickly towards his mother ; but, before he could open his lips, she told him, speaking with a sudden and unexampled severity of tone, that he was on no account to think of going to the office as usual, but was to wait at home until his father's return—and then hurried from the room. The fact was, that Mrs. Thorpe distrusted her own inflexibility, if she stayed too long in the presence of her penitent son ; but Zack could not, unhappily, know this. He could only see that she left him abruptly, after delivering an ominous message ; and could only place the gloomiest and most disheartening interpretation on her conduct.

“ When mother turns against me, I've lost my last chance, and nothing's left for it but to—” he stopped before he ended the sentence, and sat up in bed, deliberating with himself for a minute or two. “ I could make up my mind to bear anything from the governor, because he has a right to row me, after what I've done. But if I stand old Yollop again, I'll be—” here, whatever Zack said was smothered in the sound of a blow, expressive of fury and despair, which he administered to the mattress on which he

was sitting. Having relieved himself thus, he jumped out of bed, pronouncing at last in real earnest, those few words of fatal slang which had often burst from his lips in other days, only as an empty threat:—

“It’s all up with me; I must bolt from home.”

He refreshed both mind and body by a good wash; but still his resolution did not falter. He hurried on his clothes, looked out of window, listened at his door; and all this time his purpose never changed. Remembering but too well the persecution he had already suffered at the hands of Mr. Yollop, the conviction that it would now be repeated with fourfold severity was enough of itself to keep him firm to his desperate intention: enough, without the additional stimulus of anticipating all that he might have to suffer from his father’s anger, or of revelling in the idea of future freedom from the monotonous servitude of his office-life.

“I’ll make this help to keep me till I see what can be done,” thought he, putting on a gold watch and chain which had been presented to him by his grandfather. “Poor old Goodworth!

he said he had made a present to the pawnbroker when he gave it to me. But I'll take it out of pledge again with the very first—" here his thoughts veered round suddenly, at the sight of his pocket-book, to his strange companion of the past night. As he reflected on the appointment for Thursday morning, his eyes brightened, and he said to himself aloud, while he turned resolutely to the door, "That queer fellow talked of going back to America; if I can't do anything else I'll go back with him!"

Just as his hand was on the lock, he was startled by a knock at the door. He opened it and found the housemaid on the landing with a letter for him. Returning to the window, he hastily undid the envelope. Several gaily-printed invitation cards with gilt edges dropped out. There was a letter among them, which proved to be in Mr. Blyth's handwriting, and ran thus:—

"Wednesday.

"MY DEAR ZACK,—The enclosed are the tickets for my picture show, which I told you about yesterday evening. I send them now, instead of waiting to give them to you to-night,

at Lavvie's suggestion. She thinks only three days' notice, from now to Saturday, rather short; and considers it advisable to save even a few hours, so as to enable you to give your friends the most time possible to make their arrangements conveniently for coming to my studio. Post all the invitation tickets therefore, that you send about among your connection, at once, as I am posting mine; and you will save a day by that means, which is a good deal. Patty is obliged to pass your house this morning, on an errand, so I send my letter by her. How conveniently things sometimes turn out; don't they?

"Introduce anybody you like; but I should prefer *intellectual* people; my figure-subject of 'Columbus in sight of the New World,' being treated mystically, and adapted to tax the popular mind to the utmost, as a work of High Art that nobody can hope to understand in a hurry.

"I am beginning to brush up the painting-room for visitors already. Madonna is helping me with the ornamental part, as only Madonna can. She finds everything, and does every-

thing, and runs up and down stairs to let Lavvie know how we are getting on, while I am only thinking about it. With such a bright, good, loving creature to decorate my painting-room, the musty old place looks like an enchanted palace already ; and I am the happiest artist that ever handled a mahl-stick.

“ I remain, my dear Zack,

“ Affectionately yours,

“ V. BLYTH.”

The perusal of this letter reminded Zack of certain recent aspirations in the direction of the fine arts, which had escaped his slippery memory altogether, while he was thinking of his future prospects. “ I’ll stick to my first idea,” thought he, “ and be an artist, if Blyth will let me, after what’s happened. If he won’t, I’ve got Mat to fall back upon ; and I’ll run as wild in America as ever he did.”

Reflecting thus, Zack descended cautiously to the back parlour, which was called a “ Library.” The open door showed him that no one was in the room. He went in ; and, in great haste, scrawled the following answer to Mr. Blyth’s letter.

“MY DEAR BLYTH,—Thank you for the tickets. I have got into a most dreadful scrape, having been found out coming home groggy at four in the morning, which I did by cribbing the family door-key. The row in store for me after this is so tremendous, that I am going to make a bolt of it. I write these lines in a tearing hurry and a dreadful fright, for fear the governor should come home before I have done—he having gone to Yollop’s to set the parson at me again worse than ever.

“I can’t come to you to-night, because your house would be the first place they would send to after me; and I don’t want to mix you up in the row. But I mean to be an artist, if you won’t desert me. Don’t, old fellow! I know I’m a d—d scamp; but I’ll try and be a reformed character, if you will only stick by me. When you take your walk to-morrow, I shall be at the turnpike in the Laburnum Road, waiting for you, at three o’clock. If you won’t come there, or won’t speak to me when you do come, I shall leave England, and take to something desperate.

“I have got a new friend—the best and most interesting fellow in the world. He has been

half his life in the wilds of America; so, if you don't give me the go-by, I shall bring him to see your picture of Columbus.

"I feel so miserable, and have got such a headache, that I can't write any more. Ever yours,

"Z. THORPE, JUN."

After directing this letter, and placing it in his pocket to be put into the post by his own hand, Zack looked towards the door, and hesitated—then advanced a step or two to go out—then paused thoughtfully—and ended by returning to the writing-table, and taking a fresh sheet of paper out of the portfolio before him.

"I can't leave the old lady (though she won't forgive me) without writing a line to keep up her spirits, and say good-bye," thought he, as he dipped the pen in the ink, and began in his usual dashing, scrawling way. But he could not get beyond "My dear Mother." The writing of those three words seemed to have suddenly paralysed him. The strong hand that had struck out so sturdily all through the fight, trembled now at merely touching a sheet of paper. Still he tried desperately to write something, even if it

were only the one word, "Good-bye,"—tried till the tears came into his eyes, and made all further effort hopeless.

He crumpled up the paper and rose hastily, brushing away the tears with his hand, and feeling a strange dread and distrust of himself as he did so. It was rarely, very rarely, that his eyes were moistened as they were moistened now. Few human beings have lived to be twenty years of age without shedding more tears than had ever been shed by Zack.

"I can't write to her while I'm at home, and I know she's in the next room to me. I will send her a letter when I'm out of the house, saying it's only for a little time, and that I'm coming back when the angry part of this infernal business is all blown over." Such was his resolution, as he tore up the crumpled paper, and went out quickly into the passage.

He took his hat from the table. *His* hat? No, he remembered that it was the hat which had been taken from the man at the tavern. At the most momentous instant of his life—when his heart was bowing down before the thought of his mother—when he was leaving home in secret,

perhaps for ever—the current of his thoughts could be incomprehensibly stopped and altered in its course by the trumpety influence of such a trifle as this !

It was thus with him ; it is thus with all of us. Our faculties are never more completely at the mercy of the smallest interests of our being, than when they appear to be most fully absorbed by the mightiest. And it is often well for us that there exists this seeming imperfection in our nature. The first cure of many a grief, after the hour of parting, or in the house of death, has begun, insensibly to ourselves, with the first moment when we were betrayed into thinking of so little a thing even as a daily meal.

The rain which had accompanied the thaw was falling faster and faster ; inside the house was dead silence, and outside it damp desolation, as Zack opened the street door ; and, without hesitating a moment, dashed out desperately through mud and wet, to cast himself loose on the thronged world of London as a fugitive from his own home.

His first thoughts, obedient to the strange direction which accident had given to them,

were all occupied in devising the best method of sending back the hat he wore to the man from whom it had been taken. A plan for accomplishing this soon suggested itself to him; and then his mind returned once more, of its own accord, to the reflections that had filled it while he was trying in vain to write a farewell letter to his mother. Before he got out of Baregrove Square, he stopped, and looked back from an angle in the pavement which gave him a view of his father's house.

He paused thus; the recollections of weeks, months, years past, all whirling through his memory in a few moments of time. He paused, looking through the damp, foggy atmosphere, at the door which he had just left—never, it might be, to approach it again; then moved away, buttoned his coat over his chest with trembling, impatient fingers, and saying to himself, “I’ve done it, and nothing can undo it now,” turned his back resolutely on Baregrove Square.

CHAPTER III.

MR. MARKSMAN'S COUNTRY TRIP.

KIRK STREET, Wendover Market, was not exactly the place which most gentlemen, having money at their disposal, would choose to reside in, on returning to their native country after long expatriation. The neighbourhood was densely populous, and by no means widely respectable; and the street itself exhibited a vagabond liveliness of character, productive of almost every known species of public nuisance of the noisy sort. Here the men of the fustian-jacket and seal-skin cap clustered tumultuous round the lintels of the gin-shop doors. Here ballad-bellowing, and organ-grinding, and voices of costermongers, singing of poor men's luxuries, never ceased all through the hum of day, and penetrated far into the frowsy repose of latest

night. Here, on Saturday evenings especially, the butcher smacked with triumphant hand the fat carcasses that hung around him; and, flourishing his steel, roared aloud to every woman who passed the shop door with a basket, to come in and buy. Here the peripatetic greengrocer stood up, a vocal commercial prop of his country, proclaiming the prices current of the apple and onion markets lustily from the top of a donkey cart. Here, with foul frequency, the language of the natives was interspersed with such words as reporters indicate in the newspapers by an expressive black line; and on this "beat," more than on most others, the night police were especially chosen from men of mighty strength to protect the sober part of the street community, and of notable cunning to persuade the drunken part to retire harmlessly brawling into the domestic (or wife-beating) seclusion of their own homes.

Such was the place in which Mr. Matthew Marksman had set up his residence, after twenty years of wandering amid the wilds of the great American Continent.

On arriving in London he had looked about

him to see what civilised life appeared like, after his long absence, and had found it in its fashionable, wealthy, and respectable aspects, without external interest or character of any kind—essentially negative, intolerably dull. Descending next to the poor and the populous aspects, he had succeeded at last in discovering something to look at. The struggle of life, with all its antagonistic glories and degradations in daily conflict which should be uppermost, was here fully exposed to view—hidden by no comfortable curtain of conventionality—hardly covered even by a veil of decency over its baser acts. Few stages could have been sought out which more freely displayed the dramatic Low Life of London than the stage presented by Kirk Street. So at that vagabond thoroughfare Mr. Marksman, being somewhat of a vagabond himself, paused sympathetically; and, entering the first house whose windows informed him that rooms were to be let within, planted his stake in the country at last, by taking a back and front British first floor for a week certain.

Never was tenant of any order or degree known to make such conditions with a landlord as were

made by Mr. Marksman. Every household convenience with which the people at the lodgings could offer to accommodate him, he considered to be a species of domestic nuisance it was particularly desirable to get rid of. He stipulated that nobody should be allowed to clean his room but himself; that the servant of all work should never attempt to make his bed, or offer to put sheets on it, or venture to cook him a bit of dinner when he stopped at home; and that he should be free to stay away unexpectedly for days and nights together, if he chose, without either landlord or landlady presuming to be anxious or to make inquiries about him, as long as they had his rent in their pockets. This rent he willingly covenanted to pay beforehand, week by week, as long as his stay lasted; and he was also liberally ready to fee the servant occasionally, provided she would engage solemnly "not to bother his life by doing anything for him."

The proprietor of the house (and tobacco-shop) was at first extremely astonished, and extremely inclined to be distrustful; but as he was likewise extremely familiar with poverty, he was not proof against the auriferous halo which the

production of a handful of bright sovereigns shed gloriously over the personal eccentricities of the new lodger. The bargain was struck; and Mr. Marksman went away directly to fetch his luggage.

After an absence of some little time, he returned with a large corn-sack on his back, and a long rifle in his hand. These articles were his luggage.

First putting the rifle on his bed, in the back room, he cleared away all the little second-hand furniture with which the front room was decorated; packing the three rickety chairs together in one corner, and turning up the cracked round table in another. Then, untying a piece of cord that secured the mouth of the corn-sack, he emptied it, over his shoulder, into the middle of the room—just (as the landlady afterwards said) as if it was coals coming in instead of luggage. Among the things which fell out on the floor in a heap, were—some bearskins and a splendid buffalo-hide, neatly packed; a pipe, two red flannel shirts, a tobacco-pouch, and an Indian blanket; a leather bag, a gunpowder flask, two squares of yellow soap, a bullet-mould, and a

nightcap; a tomahawk, a paper of nails, a scrubbing-brush, a hammer, and an old gridiron. Having emptied the sack, Mr. Marksman took up the buffalo-hide, and spread it out on his bed, with a very expressive sneer at the patchwork counterpane and meagre curtains. He next threw down the bearskins, with the empty sack under them, in an unoccupied corner; propped up the leather bag between two angles of the wall; took his pipe from the floor; left everything else lying in the middle of the room; and, sitting down on the bearskins with his back against the bag, told the astonished landlord that he was quite settled and comfortable now, and would thank him to go down stairs, and send up a pound of the strongest tobacco he had in the shop.

Mr. Marksman's subsequent proceedings during the rest of the day, especially such as were connected with his method of laying in a stock of provisions, and cooking his own dinner, exhibited the same extraordinary disregard of all civilised precedent, which had marked his first entry into the lodgings. After he had dined, he took a nap on his bearskins; woke up restless, and grumbling

at the close air and the confined room ; smoked a long series of pipes, looking out of window all the time with quietly observant, constantly attentive eyes ; and, finally, rising to the climax of all previous oddities, came down stairs when the tobacco-shop was being shut up after the closing of the neighbouring theatre, and coolly asked which was his nearest way into the country, as he wanted to clear his head, and stretch his legs, by making a walking night of it in the fresh air.

He began the next morning by cleaning both his rooms thoroughly with his own hands, as he had told the landlord he would ; and seemed to enjoy the occupation mightily in his own grim, grave way. His dining, napping, smoking, and observant study of the street view from his window, followed as on the previous day. But at night, instead of setting forth into the country as before, he wandered into the streets ; and, in the course of his walk, happened to pass the door of the Temple of Harmony. What happened to him there is already known ; but what became of him afterwards remains to be seen.

On leaving Zack, he walked straight on ; not slackening his pace, not noticing whither he went,

not turning to go back till daybreak. It was past nine o'clock before he presented himself at the tobacco-shop, bringing in with him a goodly share of mud and wet from the thawing ground and rainy sky outside. His long walk did not seem to have relieved the uneasiness of mind which had induced him to separate so suddenly from Zack. He talked almost perpetually to himself in a muttering, incoherent way ; his heavy brow was contracted, and the scars of the old wounds on his face looked angry and red. The first thing he did was to make some inquiries of his landlord relating to railway travelling, and to the part of London in which a certain terminus that he had been told of was situated. Finding it not easy to make him understand any directions connected with this latter point, the shopkeeper suggested sending for a cab to take him to the railway. He briefly assented to that arrangement ; occupying the time before the vehicle arrived, in walking sullenly backwards and forwards over the pavement in front of the shop door.

When the cab came to take him up, he insisted, with characteristic regardlessness of appearances, on riding upon the roof, because he could get

more air to blow over him, and more space for stretching his legs in, there than inside. Arriving in this irregular and vagabond fashion at the terminus, he took his ticket for DIBBLEDEAN, a quiet little market town in one of the midland counties.

When he was set down at the station, he looked about him rather perplexedly at first; but soon appeared to recognise a road, visible at some little distance, which led to the town; and towards which he immediately directed his steps, scorning all offers of accommodation from the local omnibus.

It did not happen to be market day; and the thaw looked even more dreary at Dibbledean than it looked in London. Down the whole perspective of the High Street there appeared only three human figures—a woman in pattens; a child under a large umbrella; and a man with a hamper on his back, walking towards the yard of the principal inn.

Mr. Marksman had slackened his pace more and more, as he approached the town, until he slackened it altogether at last, by coming to a dead stand-still under the walls of the old church; which stood at one extremity of the High

Street, in what seemed to be the suburban district of Dibbledean. He waited for some time, looking over the low parapet wall which divided the churchyard from the road, then slowly approached a gate leading to a path among the grave-stones, stopped at it—apparently changed his purpose—and, turning off abruptly, walked up the High Street.

He did not pause again till he arrived opposite a long, low, gabled-house, evidently one of the oldest buildings in the place, though brightly painted and whitewashed, to look as new and unpicturesque as possible. The basement story was divided into two shops; which, however, proclaimed themselves as belonging now, and having belonged also in former days, to one and the same family. Over the larger of the two was painted in letters of goodly size:—

Bradford and Son (late Joshua Grice), Linen-drappers, Hosiers, &c. &c.

The board on which these words were traced, was continued over the smaller shop; where it was additionally superscribed thus:—

Mrs. Bradford (late Johanna Grice), Milliner and Dressmaker.

Regardless of rain, and droppings from eaves that trickle heavily down his hat and coat, Mr. Marksman stands motionless, reading and re-reading these inscriptions from the opposite side of the way. Though the whole man, from top to toe, looks like the very impersonation of firmness, he nevertheless hesitates most unnaturally now. He knows that he has a certain discovery to make; he knows that he must begin the search which is to lead to that discovery, either in the shop before him, or in the churchyard which he has left behind him: but for some time he cannot choose his alternative. At last, he decides to begin with the churchyard, and retraces his steps accordingly.

He enters quickly by the gate at which he delayed before; and pursues the path among the graves a little way. Then striking off over the grass after a moment's consideration and looking about him, he winds his course hither and thither among the turf mounds; and stops suddenly at a plain flat tombstone, raised horizontally above the earth by a foot or so of brickwork. Bending down over it, he reads the characters engraven on the slab.

There are four inscriptions, all of the simplest and shortest kind ; comprising nothing but a record of the names, ages, and birth and death dates of the dead who lie beneath. The first two inscriptions notify the deaths of children :— “ Joshua Grice, son of Joshua and Susan Grice, of this parish, aged four years ;” and “ Susan Grice, daughter of the above, aged thirteen years.” The next death recorded is the mother’s : and the last is the father’s, at the age of sixty-two. Below this follows a quotation from the New Testament :—*Come unto me all ye that are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest.* It is on these lines, and on the record above them of the death of Joshua Grice the elder, that the eyes of the lonely reader rest the longest ; his lips murmuring several times, as he looks down on the letters :—“ He lived to be an old man—he lived to be an old man, after all ! ”

There is sufficient vacant space left towards the bottom of the tombstone, for two or three more inscriptions ; and it would appear that Mr. Marksman expected to have seen more. He looks intently at the vacant space, and measures it roughly with his fingers, comparing

it with the space above, which is occupied by letters. "Not there," he says to himself; "not there at any rate!"—as he leaves the churchyard, and walks back to the town.

This time he enters the double shop—the hosiery division of it—without hesitation. No one is there, but the young man who serves behind the counter. And right glad the young man is, having been long left without a soul to speak to on that rainy morning, to see some one—even a stranger with a queer skull-cap under his hat—enter the shop at last.

What can he serve the gentleman with? The gentleman does not come to buy. He only wants to know if the young man can tell him whether Johanna Grice, who used to keep the dressmaker's shop, is still living?

Oh yes! the young man can tell him that, and a great deal more besides; being glad to feel his own tongue wag after long silence and depressing loneliness behind the counter. Miss Grice (the young man is more polite in speaking of her than the stranger)—Miss Grice, whose brother once had the business now carried on by Bradford and Son, still lives, all by herself, in the town; and is a

very curious old person, who never goes out, and lets nobody inside her doors. Most of her old friends are dead ; and those who are still alive she has broken with. She is full of fierce, wild ways ; is generally suspected of being crazy ; and is execrated by the boys of Dibbledean as an "old tiger-cat." The young man thinks it possible that her intellects may have been a little shaken somehow, years ago, and before his time, by a dreadful scandal in the family, which quite crushed them down ; being very respectable, religious people. It was a scandal that made a great stir, he believes, in its day ; and was about——

Here the young man is interrupted, in a very peculiar and uncivil manner, as he thinks, by the stranger, who desires to know nothing about the scandal, but has another question to ask. This question seems to be rather a difficult one to put ; for he begins it two or three times, in two or three different forms of words, and cannot get on with it. At last, he ends by asking, generally, whether any other members of old Mr. Grice's family are still alive.

For a moment or so the young man is stupid

and puzzled, and doesn't know what other members the gentleman means. Old Mrs. Grice died some time ago ; and there were two children who died young, and whose names are in the churchyard. Does the gentleman mean?—ah, yes, to be sure ! of course he must—the second daughter, who folks say lived and grew up beautiful, and was, as the story goes, the cause of all the scandal. She ran away, and died miserably somehow—nobody knows how ; and was supposed to have been buried like a pauper somewhere—nobody knows where, except perhaps Miss Grice. But it all happened a long time ago, and really——

The young man stops short and looks perplexed. A sudden change has passed over the strange gentleman's face. His swarthy cheeks have turned to a cold clay colour, through which those two strange scars seem to burn fiercer than ever, like streaks of fire. His heavy hand and arm tremble a little as he leans against the counter. Is he going to be taken ill? No: this man's heart is strong ; his will is resolute ; his body has been used to hard shocks and sharp pangs ; and he will recover himself as many other men in his

condition perhaps could not. He falters a little, but he walks at once from the counter to the door — turns round there — and asks where Johanna Grice lives. The young man says, the second turning to the right, down a street which ends in a lane of cottages. Miss Grice's is the last cottage on the left hand; but he can assure the gentleman that it will be quite useless to go there, for she lets nobody in. The gentleman thanks him, and goes, nevertheless.

“I didn't think it would have took me so,” he says, walking quickly up the street; “and it wouldn't if I'd heard it anywhere else. But I'm not the man I was, now I'm in the old place again. Over twenty year of hardening, don't seem to have hardened me yet!”

He follows the directions given him, correctly enough, arrives at the last cottage on his left hand, and tries the garden gate. It is locked; and there is no bell to ring. But the paling is low, and Mr. Marksman is not scrupulous. He gets over it, and advances to the cottage door. It opens, like other doors in the country, merely by turning the handle of the lock. He goes in without any hesitation, and enters the first room into

which the passage leads him. It is a small parlour; and, at the back window, which looks out on a garden, sits Johanna Grice, a thin, dwarfish old woman, poring over a big book that looks like a Bible. She starts from her chair, as she hears the sound of footsteps, and totters up fiercely, with wild wandering grey eyes, and horny threatening hands to meet the intruder. He lets her come close to him; then mentions a name—pronouncing it twice, very distinctly.

She pauses instantly, livid pale, with gaping lips, and arms hanging rigid at her side; as if that name, or the voice in which it was uttered, had frozen up in a moment all the little life left in her. Then she moves back slowly, groping with her hands like one in the dark—back, till she touches the wall of the room. Against this she leans, trembling violently; not speaking a word; her wild eyes staring panic-stricken on the man who is confronting her.

He sits down unbidden, and asks if she does not remember him. No answer is given: no movement made that might serve instead of answer. He asks again; a little impatiently this time.

She nods her head and stares on him—still speechless, still trembling.

He tells her what he has heard at the shop ; and, using the shopman's phrases, asks whether it is true that the daughter of old Mr. Grice, who was the cause of all the scandal in the family, has died long since, away from her home, and in a miserable way.

Her eyes flash at him fiercely—then shrink before his. She cowers closer into the corner of the wall ; and tells him in a faint, quavering voice that she will not, and dare not speak of that which he calls a scandal.

He answers that he wants to know nothing of the scandal itself ; for, years and years ago, he got a letter that told him of it when it happened—a letter that he has kept ever since, and that he will never forget. What he *does* want to know, and *will* know, is, whether it be true that Mary (he mentions the name now) is dead.

There is something in his look, as he speaks, which seems to oblige her to answer, against her will. She says, Yes ; and trembles more violently than ever.

He clasps his hands together ; his head droops a

little ; dark shadows seem to move over his bent face ; and the scars of the old wounds deepen to a livid violet hue. He begins to speak again—then stops suddenly, and remains for some minutes speechless.

His silence and hesitation seem to inspire Johanna Grice with sudden confidence and courage. She moves a little away from the wall ; and a gleam of evil triumph lightens over her face, as she reiterates her last answer of her own accord. Yes ! the wretch who ruined the good name of the family *is* dead—dead, and buried far off, in some grave by herself—not in the same grave where her honest kindred lie—not there, in the churchyard, with her father and mother—oh, no, thank God, not there !

He looks up at her instantly, when she says these words. There is some warning influence in his eye, as it rests on her, which sends her cowering back again to her former place against the wall. He asks sternly where Mary is buried. The reply—doled out doggedly and slowly ; forced from her word by word—is, that she was buried among strangers, as she deserved to be—at a place called Bangbury—far away in the next county,

where she died, and where money was sent to bury her.

His manner becomes less roughly imperative ; his eyes soften ; his voice saddens in tone, when he speaks again. And yet, the next question that he puts to Johanna Grice seems to pierce her to the quick, to try her to the heart, as no questioning has tried her before. The muscles are writhing on her haggard face, her breath is bursting from her in quick, fierce pantings, as he asks, whether it was only suspicion, or really the truth, that Mary was with child when she left her home.

No answer is given to him. He repeats the question, and insists on having one. Was it suspicion or truth ? The reply hisses out at him in one whispered word—Truth.

Was the child born alive ?

The answer comes again in the same harsh whisper ; the panting breath heaving quicker and quicker yet, and a dark blood-tinge rising slowly over the fleshless, yellow cheek—Yes : born alive.

What became of it ?

She never saw it—never asked about it—never knew. While she replies thus, the whispering

accents change, and rise sullenly to hoarse, distinct tones. The questioner murmurs something to himself—half articulate words of cursing against the merciless who never forgive—then becomes silent again. During this silence, the dark blood-tinge spreads fast over Johanna Grice's face ; and the pantings quicken to moaning, breathless gasps. But it is not till he speaks to her once more that the smothered fury flashes out into flaming rage. Then, even as he raises his head and opens his lips, she staggers, with outstretched arms, up to the table at which she had been reading when he came in ; and strikes her bony hands on the open Bible ; and swears by the Word of Truth in that Book, that she will answer him no more.

He rises calmly ; and with something of contempt in his look, approaches the table, and speaks. But his voice is drowned by hers, bursting from her in screams of fury. No ! no ! no ! Not a word more ! How dare he come there, with his shameless face and his threatening eyes, and make her speak of what should never have passed her lips again—never till she went up to render her account at the Judgment Seat ? How dare he

come between her and God, with his talk of this world, which it is profanation for her to hear while she is preparing for the next? Relations! let him not speak to her of relations. The only kindred she ever cared to own lie heart-broken under the great stone in the churchyard. Relations! if they all came to life again that very minute, what could she have to do with them, whose only relation was Death? Yes; Death, that was father, mother, brother, sister to her now! Death, that was waiting to take her in God's good time. What! would he stay on yet? stay on in spite of her? stay after she had sworn not to answer him another word?

Yes; let her rave at him as she pleases, he *will* stay. He is resolved to know more yet. Did Mary leave nothing behind her, in the bitter day when she fled from her home? Give him an answer to that, for that he is determined to know; and more, too, afterwards—more, till he knows all.

Some suddenly-conceived resolution seems to calm the first fury of her passion, while he says these words. She stretches out her hand quickly, and grips him by the arm, and looks up in his face with a wicked exultation in her wild eyes.

He *will* know all, will he? Then he shall! but not from her lips! All the black iniquity shall be exposed before him from first to last. It shall break his heart; and crush him into old age like hers! He is bent on knowing what that ruined wretch left behind her, is he? Let him follow her, then, and he shall see!

Between the leaves of Johanna Grice's Bible there is a key, which seems to be used as a marker. She takes it out, and leads the way, with toilsome step and hands outstretched for support, to the wall on one side, and the bannisters on the other, up the one flight of stairs which communicates with the bed-room story of the cottage.

He follows close behind her; and is standing by her side, when she opens a door, and points into a room, telling him to take what he finds there, and then go—she cares not whither, so long as he goes from her.

She descends the stairs again, as he enters the room. There is a close, faint, airless smell in it. Cobwebs, pendulous and brown with dirt, hang from the ceiling. The grimy window-panes soil and sadden all the light that pours through them faintly. He looks round him hastily, and sees no

furniture anywhere; no sign that the room has ever been lived in, ever entered even, for years and years past. He looks again, more carefully; and detects, in one dim corner, something covered with dust and dirt, which looks like a small box.

He pulls it out towards the window. Dust flies from it in clouds. Loathsome, crawling creatures creep from under it, and from off it. He stirs it with his foot still nearer to the faint light; and sees that it is a common deal-box, corded. He looks closer, and through cobwebs, and dead insects, and foul stains of all kinds, spells out a name that is painted on it: MARY GRICE.

At the sight of that name, and of the pollution that covers it, he pauses, silent and thoughtful: and, at the same moment, hears the parlour door below, locked. He stoops hastily, takes up the box by the cord round it, and leaves the room. His hand touches a substance, as it grasps the cord, which does not feel like wood. He examines the box by the clearer light falling on the landing from a window in the roof; and discovers a letter nailed to the cover. There is something written on it; but the paper is dusty, the ink is faded by time, and the characters are hard to

decipher. By dint of perseverance, however, he makes out from them this inscription : “Justification of my conduct towards my niece : to be read after my death. Johanna Grice.”

As he passes the parlour door, he hears her voice, reading. He stops and listens. The words that reach his ears seem familiar to them ; and yet he knows not, at first, what book they come from. He listens a little longer ; and then his recollections of his boyhood and of home help him ; and he knows that the book from which Johanna Grice is reading aloud to herself, is the Bible.

His face darkens, and he goes out quickly into the garden ; but stops before he reaches the paling, and, turning back to the front window of the parlour, looks in. He sees her sitting with her back to him, with elbows on the table, and hands working feverishly in her tangled grey hair. Her voice is still audible ; but the words it pronounces cannot any longer be distinguished. He waits at the window for a few moments ; then leaves it suddenly, saying to himself : “ I wonder the book doesn’t strike her dead ! ” These are his only words of farewell. With this thought in

his heart, he turns his back on the cottage, and on Johanna Grice.

Which way shall he betake himself? Back to the town, or forward into the country? Forward. The old yearning to be alone, and out of the sight of human beings, has overcome him again.

He goes on through the rain, taking the box with him, and looking about for some sheltered place in which he can open it. After walking nearly a mile, he sees an old cattle-shed, a little way off the road—a rotten, deserted place; but it may afford some little shelter, even yet: so he enters it.

There is one dry corner left; dry enough, at least, to suit his purpose. In that he kneels down, and cuts the cord round the box—then hesitates to open it—and begins by tearing away the letter outside, from the nail that fastens it to the cover.

It is a long letter, written in a close, crabbed hand. He runs his eye over it impatiently, till his attention is accidentally caught and arrested by two or three lines, more clearly penned than the rest, near the middle of a page. For many years he has been unused to reading any written characters; and he finds them more trouble-

some to decipher now than when he was a boy. But he spells out resolutely the words in these few lines that have struck his eye; and finds that they run thus :—

“ I have now only to add, before proceeding to the miserable confession of our family dishonour, that I never afterwards saw, and only once heard of, the man who tempted my niece to commit the deadly sin, which was her ruin in this world, and will be her ruin in the next.”

Beyond these words, he makes no effort to read further. Few as they are, they have been evidently enough to oppress him with unwelcome recollections and disquieting thoughts, from which he struggles for deliverance resolutely; and which leave him, when he tears himself free of them at last, with the letter crushed up into a shapeless twist of paper in his hand. Thrusting it hastily into his pocket, without so much as a passing attempt to smooth it out again, he turns once more to the box.

It is sealed up with strips of tape; but not locked. He forces the lid open, and sees inside a few simple articles of woman's wearing apparel; a little work-box; a lace collar, with the needle

and thread still sticking in it; several letters, here tied up in a packet, there scattered carelessly; a gaily bound album; a quantity of dried ferns and flower-leaves that have apparently fallen from between the pages; a piece of canvass with a slipper-pattern worked on it; and a black dress waistcoat with some unfinished embroidery on the collar. It is plain to him, at a first glance, that these things have been thrown into the box any how, and have been left just as they were thrown. For a moment or two, he keeps his eyes fixed on the strange and sad confusion displayed before him; then turns away his head, whispering to himself, mournfully, and many times, that name of "Mary," which he has already pronounced while in the presence of Johanna Grice. After a little, he looks back again into the box; mechanically picks out the different letters that lie scattered about it; mechanically eyes the broken seals and the addresses on each; mechanically puts them back again unopened, until he comes to one which feels as if it had something inside it. This circumstance stimulates him into unfolding the enclosure, and examining what the letter may contain.

Nothing but a piece of paper neatly folded. He undoes the folds, and finds part of a lock of hair inside, which he wraps up again the moment he sees it, as if anxious to conceal it from view as soon as possible. The letter he examines more deliberately. It is in a woman's handwriting; is directed to "Miss Mary Grice, Dibbledean;" and is only dated "Bond Street, London. Wednesday." The post-mark, however, shows that it was written many years ago. It is not very long; so he sets himself to the task of making it all out from beginning to end.

This is what he reads:—

"MY DEAREST MARY,

"I have just sent you your pretty hair bracelet by the coach, nicely sealed and packed up by the jeweller. I have directed it to you by your own name, as I direct this, remembering what you told me about your father making it a point of honour never to open your letters and parcels; and forbidding that ugly aunt Johanna of yours ever to do so either. I hope you will receive this and the little packet about the same time.

“ I will answer for your thinking the pattern of your bracelet much improved, since the new hair has been worked in with the old. How slyly you will run away to your own room, and *blush unseen*, like the flower in the poem, when you look at it! You may be rather surprised, perhaps, to see some little gold fastenings introduced as additions; but this, the jeweller told me, was a matter of necessity. Your poor dear sister’s hair being the only material of the bracelet, when you sent it up to me to be altered, was very different from the hair of that faultless true-love of yours that you also sent to be worked in with it. It was, in fact, hardly half long enough to plait up properly with poor Susan’s, from end to end; so the jeweller had to join it with little gold clasps, as you will see. It is very prettily run in along with the old hair though. No country jeweller could have done it half as nicely, so you did well to send it to London after all. I consider myself rather a judge of these things; and I say positively that it is now the prettiest hair bracelet I ever saw.

“ Do you see him as often as ever? He ought to be true and faithful to you, when you show how

dearly you love him, by mixing his hair with poor Susan's, whom you were always so fondly attached to. I say he *ought*; but *you* are sure to say he *will*—and I am quite ready, love, to believe that you are the wiser of the two.

“I would write more, but have no time. It is just the regular London season now, and we are worked out of our lives. I envy you dressmakers in the country; and almost wish I was back again at Dibbledean, to be tyrannised over from morning to night by Miss Johanna. I know she is your aunt, my dear; but I can't help saying that I hate her very name!

“Ever your affectionate friend,

“JANE HOLDSWORTH.

“P.S.—The jeweller sent back the hair he did not want; and I, as in duty bound, return it, enclosed, to you, its lawful owner.”

Those scars on Mr. Marksman's face, which indicate the stir of strong feelings within him more palpably than either his expression or his manner, begin to burn redly again while he spells his way through this letter. He crumples it up hastily round the enclosure, instead of folding it

as it was folded before; and is about to cast it back sharply into the box, when the sight of the wearing apparel and half finished work lying inside, seems to stay his hand, and teach it on a sudden to move tenderly. He smooths out the paper with care; folds it as it was folded before; and places it very gently among the rest of the letters—then looks at the box thoughtfully for a moment or two; takes from his pocket the letter that he first examined, and drops it in among the others—then suddenly and sharply closes the lid of the box again.

“I can’t touch any more of her things,” he says to himself; “I can’t so much as look at ’em, somehow, without its making me—” he stops to tie up the box; straining the cords with unnecessary tightness, as if the mere physical exertion of pulling hard at something were a relief to him at this moment. “I’ll open it again, and look it over, in a day or two, when I’m away from the old place here,” he goes on, jerking sharply at the last knot—“when I’m away from the old place, and have got to be my own man again.”

He leaves the shed; regains the road; and stops, looking up and down, and all round him,

indecisively. Whither shall he turn his steps now? A thought of going to the place where he has been told "Mary" is buried, to find out her grave, and discover if he can how she died, crosses his mind; but he dismisses it again, believing that it will be better to defer undertaking any such pilgrimage as this, until after he has read all the letters, and carefully examined all the objects in the box. There is nothing, therefore, now to be done, but to go back to London by the next train that stops at Dibbledean Station.

The tobacco-shop in Kirk Street has had the gas turned on for some hours, and the proprietor is smoking his second evening cheroot at the door, when he sees his strange lodger approach, carrying on this occasion what really looks like a Christian and civilised article of luggage. The tobacconist naturally expects, after having had a little talk with Mr. Marksman on his departure in the morning, to have a little more talk with him on his return at night. Never were expectations more completely frustrated. Mr. Marksman passes his landlord quickly, with an odd altered

look in his face ; growls out “ Good night,” and lets himself in at the private door, without speaking another word.

The tobacconist joins his wife behind the counter, and expresses a conviction that something must have gone wrong with the new lodger since he has been down in the country. The tobacconist’s wife says, “ Let’s listen.”

Mr. Marksman’s room is over the shop, and the house is a London house—or, in other words, is built in the flimsiest possible way, with the flimsiest possible materials. Accordingly, whatever is done above is heard below—even a slight sneeze in, what is called, the “ Drawing-room,” is enough to wake the echoes far and wide in the shop.

They listen ; and hear the box Mr. Marksman has brought with him deposited on the floor—all the clay pipes and tin canisters about them rattling responsive to the shock. Next, Mr. Marksman himself is heard to sit down in his usual odd way, and in his usual odd corner, on the bearskins—and, again, the pipes and canisters rattle more sharply than ever. After this all sound ceases ; and then the tobacconist’s wife reminds her husband

that they have not heard the *whizz* of a lucifer-match up-stairs, and that, consequently, the new lodger must be sitting in the dark.

Struck by this circumstance, struck still more by the continued absence of all movement on the part of the usually restless Mr. Marksman, they go on listening, at intervals, all through the evening ; but hear nothing except the low, rumbling sound of his voice now and then, which proves that he is at least alive, and talking to himself. At last, the shop shuts up ; and, for the first time since his arrival, he does not leave his room to go out roaming as usual. The tobacconist walks up-stairs to bed, at the top of the house ; and his wife follows him with proper conjugal docility—but only as far as the first-floor landing. There she stops short, kneels down softly, holds her breath, and looks through the keyhole.

When she joins her husband again in the nuptial chamber, she has not much to tell him. She has seen with her own eyes that there is no light in the lodger's room, except what comes in from the gas-lamp in the street. She has just been able to make out Mr. Marksman's bulky figure, crouched up in his usual corner by the

window, with his hand on the box, and his head dropped on his breast. She thinks he has fallen off into a sort of uneasy sleep; and she can give a shrewd guess that, if he be in any great trouble, it is all about some woman. For she left him moaning and mumbling in his sleep; and is next to certain that he let out the name of "Mary" two or three times, while she was listening at the key-hole.

CHAPTER IV.



LOOSE ON THE WORLD.

A QUARTER of an hour's rapid walking took Zack well out of the neighbourhood of Baregrove Square, and launched him in vagabond independence loose on the world. He had a silk handkerchief and sevenpence halfpenny in his pockets—his available assets consisted of a very handsome gold watch and chain—his only article of baggage was a blackthorn stick—and his anchor of hope was the pawnbroker.

His first action, now that he was his own master, showed that there remained one consideration, at least, connected with his home, which had power to influence him still. He went direct to the nearest stationer's shop that he could find, and there wrote the letter to his mother which he had vainly endeavoured to write

in the library at Baregrove Square. He begged her pardon in it once again—entreated her not to be uneasy about him—declared solemnly that he had only gone away because Mr. Yollop and his father together would have driven him frantic, and hurried him into the commission of some new enormity, if he had remained—protested that he had already become a reformed character—and promised that he would write a second time and say what his plans for the future were, as soon as they were formed. It was altogether about as awkward, scrambling, and incoherent a letter as ever was composed. But, faulty as it was, Zack felt easier when he had completed it—easier still when he had fairly dropped it into the post-office along with his other letter to Mr. Valentine Blyth.

The next duty that claimed him was the first great duty of civilised humanity—the filling of an empty purse. Most young gentlemen in his station of life, would have found the process to which he was now reduced of pawning a watch in the streets of London, and in broad daylight, rather an embarrassing one. But Zack was born impervious to a sense of respectability. He marched

into the first pawnbroker's he came to with as solemn an air of business, and marched out again with as serene an expression of satisfaction, as if he had just been drawing a handsome salary, or just been delivering a heavy deposit into the hands of his banker.

Once provided with pecuniary resources, Zack felt himself at liberty to begin "spending the day" in good earnest, as a free Briton whose pockets were equal to any emergency. Having breakfasted and dried his clothes at a tavern, he set himself to decide at leisure the important question of what he should do next. After much reflection and attentive contemplation of the wretched state of the weather, it occurred to him that a good long ride in a cab, with a bottle of pale ale and a packet of cigars to keep him company, would be a healthy, sensible, and novel kind of amusement to begin with—so he devoted himself to it immediately. Resolving to ride through those parts of London with which he was least familiarly acquainted, he issued directions to the cabman to go over the water first of all, and then to drive on incessantly due east, until further orders. The route thus vaguely indicated

took him from the Waterloo Road, through the Borough and Bermondsey, to Rotherhithe. No more profoundly depressing division of the metropolis could well have been chosen to drive through on a rainy day ; but Zack was not to be depressed by anything. He drank, smoked, and revelled luxuriously in the sense of being free again to do as he liked in the daytime. His high spirits were even proof against the back settlements of Rotherhithe, steaming in rain, seething in mud, and smothered in fog. They lasted all through the drive out to the east, and all through the drive in to the west again ; and finally prompted him to try a new frolic, just as the cab entered the regions of the Borough once more.

In the neighbourhood of the Market Zack observed a tavern, displaying in one of its windows a notification that an "Ordinary," or British *table d'hôte*, was open inside to all comers, at three o'clock. He stopped the cabman directly. Having heard the clocks strike three about ten minutes ago ; and having never seen an "ordinary" in his life, he determined to go into the tavern and dine. He found the dinner just

begun, and the society pleasantly “general” in its composition, if it was nothing else. As usual, he got on excellent speaking terms with every body at table, five minutes after he had sat down; and became particularly familiar and intimate with his four nearest neighbours—a master-butcher, a tripe-dresser, and a brace of fruit-salesmen. The first two of these commercial gentlemen were making a holiday of it; and Zack was making a holiday of it; and they all three grew as open-hearted as possible under the genial influences of a dessert composed entirely of grog and pipes—the end of it being that they decided on adjourning together, after a convivial afternoon at the tavern, to the Victoria Theatre. Here the master-butcher, who was benevolent to a fault in spite of the sanguinary nature of his vocation in life, insisted on paying for the whole party; but Zack took his revenge later in the evening, at supper, by generously providing oysters for three at his own expense. What happened when supper was over he was never able to remember distinctly. He had a dim recollection of going somewhere with the tripe-dresser, and of singing the tenor part in the glee

of "Mynheer Van Dunk," with somebody else. But after this there occurred a hiatus in his history, which he could only resume with the next morning; when he woke up in bed at the tavern where the "ordinary" had been held, and was informed by the waiter that the faithful tripe-dresser had left him there to finish the night respectably in an honest place.

That next morning was the beginning of an important day in Zack's life. Much depended on the interviews he was about to seek with Mr. Marksman in Kirk Street, and with Mr. Blyth at the turnpike in the Laburnum Road. As he paid his bill at the tavern, and started, by no means at so early an hour as he could have wished, for the distant suburb of Wendover Market, his conscience was not altogether easy, when he reflected on the manner in which he had spent the past evening; and recalled the passage in his letter to his mother, which assured her that he had begun to be a reformed character already. "I'll make a clean breast of it to Blyth, and do exactly what he tells me when I meet him at the turnpike." Fortifying himself with this good resolution, Zack arrived at Kirk

Street, and knocked at the private door of the tobacconist's shop.

Mr. Marksman, having seen him from the window, called to him to come up, as soon as the door was opened. The moment they shook hands, young Thorpe noticed that his new friend looked altered. His face seemed to have grown down-cast and weary, his eyes heavy and vacant, since they had last met.

"I say, Mat, what's happened to you?" asked Zack. "You have been somewhere in the country, haven't you? And what news do you bring back, old fellow? Good, I hope?"

"Bad as can be," returned Mat, gruffly. "Don't you say another word to me about it. If you do, we part company again. Talk of something else. Anything you like; and the sooner the better."

Forbidden to discourse any more concerning his friend's affairs, Zack veered about directly, and began to discourse concerning his own. Starting with a general summary of his tribulations at home, he went on to a full description of his unsuccessful attempt to steal upstairs to bed unheard; proceeded to a minute narrative of

everything he had done since leaving Baregrove Square the morning before; adverted to his approaching interview with Mr. Blyth; and wound up with a copiously incoherent explanation of his own ideas about his future prospects.

Without putting a single question, or giving a single answer, without displaying externally the smallest astonishment or the slightest sympathy, Mr. Marksman stood gravely listening until Zack had quite done. He then went to the corner of the room where the round table was, pulled the upturned lid back upon the pedestal, drew from the breast-pocket of his coat a roll of beaver-skin, slowly undid it, displayed upon the table a goodly collection of bank notes, and pointing to them, said to young Thorpe,—“Take what you want.”

It was not easy to surprise Zack; but this proceeding so completely astonished him, that for the first moment or two, he stared at the bank notes in speechless amazement. Mr. Marksman took his pipe from a nail in the wall, filled the bowl with tobacco, and pointing with the stem towards the table, repeated,—“Take what you want.”

This time, Zack found words in which to

express himself, and used them pretty freely to praise Mat's unexampled generosity, and to decline taking a single farthing. Mr. Marksman deliberately lit his pipe, without paying the smallest attention; and then bluntly interrupted young Thorpe in these terms:—

“You may as well keep all that talking for somebody else: it's gibberish to *me*. Don't bother; and take what you want. Money's what you want, though you won't own it. That's money. When it's gone, I can go back to California and get more. While it lasts, make it spin. What is there to stare at? I told you I'd be a brother to you, because of what you done for me the other night. Well: I'm being a brother to you now. Get your watch out of pawn; and then you can shake a loose leg at the world. *Will* you take what you want? And when you have, just tie up the rest, and chuck 'em over here.” With these words, Mr. Marksman sat down on his bearskins, and sulkily surrounded himself with clouds of tobacco smoke.

Finding it quite impossible to make him understand those delicacies and refinements of civilised life, which make one gentleman (always excepting

a clergyman at Easter time) unwilling to accept money from another gentleman, as a gift—perceiving that he was beginning to lose his temper, under the infliction of remonstrances, which he seemed to receive as declarations of personal enmity and distrust—and well knowing, moreover, that a little money to go on with, would be really a very acceptable accommodation under existing circumstances, Zack consented to take two ten pound notes, as a loan. At this reservation, Mr. Marksman scoffed contemptuously; but young Thorpe enforced it, by tearing a leaf out of his pocket-book, and writing an acknowledgment for the sum he had borrowed. Mat roughly and resolutely refused to receive the document; but Zack tied it up along with the bank-notes; and threw the beaver-skin roll back to its owner, as requested.

“Do you want a bed to sleep in?” asked Mr. Marksman. “Say yes, or no, at once! I won’t have no more gibberish. I ain’t a gentleman, and I can’t shake up along with them as are. It’s no use trying it on with me, young un. I’m not much better than a cross between a savage and a Christian. I’m a battered, lonesome, scalped old

vagabond—that's what I am ! But I'm brothers with you, for all that. What's mines yours ; and if you tell me it isn't again, me and you are likely to quarrel. Do you want a bed to sleep in ? Yes ? or No ? ”

Yes ; Zack certainly wanted a bed ; but—

“There's one for you,” said Mr. Marksman, pointing through the folding-doors into the back room. “*I* don't want it. I hav'nt slept in a bed these twenty years and more, and I can't do it now. I take dog's snoozes in this corner ; and I shall take more dog snoozes out of doors in the day-time, when the sun begins to shine. I havn't been used to much sleep, and I don't want much. Go in and try if the bed's long enough for you.”

Zack began to expostulate again ; but Mat interrupted him directly.

“I suppose you don't care to sleep next door to such as me,” said he. “You wouldn't turn your back on a bit of my blanket though, if we were out in the lonesome places together. Never mind ! You won't cotton to me all at once, I dare say. Well: I cotton to *you*, in spite of that. D—n the bed ! Take it, or leave it, which you like.”

Zack the reckless, who was always ready at five minutes' notice to make friends with any living being under the canopy of heaven ; who, only last night, had "cottoned" to a master butcher, and a tripe-dresser—Zack the gregarious, who in his days of roaming the country before he was fettered to an office stool, had "cottoned" to every species of rustic vagabond, from a traveling tinker to a resident poacher—now, indignantly, and in perfect sincerity, repudiated the construction which had been placed on his unwillingness to take the offered bed ; and declared warmly that he would sleep in it that very night, by way of showing himself worthy of Mat's assistance and regard, if worthy of nothing else. He was about to add that he had only hesitated at accepting the invitation, from an apprehension that he would be forbidden to pay his share towards the rent of the lodgings ; but wisely suppressed this acknowledgment for the present, and resolved, at the first future opportunity, on insisting that he should be privileged to pay the expenses of the bedroom as long as he occupied it.

"There ! now the bother's over at last, I

suppose,” said Mr. Marksman, with an air of great relief. “Pull in the buffalo hide, and bring your legs to an anchor anywhere you like. I’m smoking. Suppose you smoke too.—Hoi! Bring up a clean pipe,” cried Mat in conclusion, turning up a loose corner of the carpet, and roaring through a crack in the floor into the shop below.

The pipe was brought. Zack sat down on the buffalo hide, and began to ask his queer friend about the life he had been leading in the wilds of North and South America. From short replies at first, Mr. Marksman was gradually beguiled into really relating some of his adventures. Wild, barbarous fragments of narrative they were; mingling together in one darkly-fantastic record, fierce triumphs and deadly dangers; miseries of cold and hunger and thirst; glories of hunters’ feasts in mighty forests; gold-findings among desolate rocks; gallopings for life from the flames of the blazing prairie; combats with wild beasts and with men wilder still; weeks of awful solitude in primeval wastes; days and nights of perilous orgies among drunken savages; visions of meteors in heaven, of hurricanes on earth, and of icebergs

blinding bright, when the sunshine was beautiful over the Polar seas. These, and other topics like them, formed the staple of Mr. Marksman's adventures ; which he related in a quiet, matter-of-course manner, that added infinitely to their effect. Young Thorpe listened in a fever of excitement. Here was the desperate, dangerous, roving life of which he had dreamed ! He longed already to engage in it : he could have listened to descriptions of it all day long. But Mat was the last man in the world to err, at any time, on the side of diffuseness in relating the results of his own experience. And he now provokingly stopped, on a sudden, in the middle of an adventure among the wild horses on the Pampas ; declaring that he was tired of hearing his own tongue wag, and had got so sick of talking of himself, that he was determined not to open his mouth again—except to put a rump-steak and a pipe in it—for the rest of the day.

Finding it impossible to make him alter this resolution, Zack thought of his engagement with Mr. Blyth, and asked what time it was. Mr. Marksman, having no watch, conveyed this inquiry into the shop by the same process of

roaring through the crack in the ceiling, which he had already employed to produce a clean pipe. The answer which was given showed Zack that he had barely time enough left to be punctual to his appointment with Valentine.

"I must be off to my friend at the turnpike," said he, rising and putting on his hat; "but I shall be back again in an hour or two. And, I say, Mat, have you thought seriously yet about going back to America?" His eyes sparkled eagerly as he put this question.

"There ain't no need to think about it," answered Mr. Marksman. "I mean to go back; but I haven't settled what day yet. And I don't know when I shall settle. I've got something to do first." Here his face darkened, and he glanced aside at the box he had brought from Dibbledean, which was now covered with one of his bearskins. "Never mind what it is; I've got it to do, and that's enough. Don't you ever go asking again about whether I've brought news from the country, or whether I haven't: don't you ever do that, and then we are safe to sail along easy together. I like you, Zack, when you don't bother me. There! Now if you want

to go, what are you stopping for? Why don't you clear out at once?"

Young Thorpe departed, laughing. It was a fine clear day; and the bright sky showed signs of a return of the frost. He was in high spirits as he walked along, thinking of Mr. Marksman's wild adventures. What was the happiest painter's life, after all, compared to such a life as Mat had been leading? Zack was hardly in the Laburnum Road, before he began to doubt already whether he had really made up his mind to be guided entirely by Mr. Blyth's advice, and to devote all his energies for the future to the cultivation of the fine arts.

Near the turnpike stood a tall gentleman, making a sketch in a note-book of some felled timber lying by the road side. This could be no other than Valentine—and Valentine it really was.

Mr. Blyth looked unusually serious, as he shook hands with young Thorpe. "Don't begin to justify yourself, Zack," said he; "I'm not going to blame you now. Let's walk on a little: I have some news to tell you from Baregrove Square."

It appeared from the narrative on which Valentine now entered, that, immediately on the receipt of Zack's letter, he had called on Mr. Thorpe, with the kindly purpose of endeavouring to make peace between the father and son. His mission had entirely failed. Mr. Thorpe had grown more and more irritable as the interview proceeded; and had accused his visitor of unwarrantable interference, when Valentine suggested the propriety of holding out some prospect of forgiveness to the runaway son. This outbreak Mr. Blyth said he abstained from noticing, out of consideration for the agitated state of the speaker's feelings. But when Mr. Yollop (who had been talking with Mrs. Thorpe up-stairs) came into the room soon afterwards, and joined in the conversation, such words had been spoken as obliged Valentine to leave the house. The reiteration of some arguments on the side of mercy which he had already advanced, had been viewed by Mr. Yollop and Mr. Thorpe (who supported whatever his clerical ally said) as so many evidences of the painter's own laxity of principle, and want of due sense of the sinfulness of vice. Upon this, the discussion had

grown warm ; and, before it closed, Mr. Yollop had hinted, with an irritating affectation of extreme politeness and humility, that Mr. Blyth's profession was not of a nature to render him capable of estimating properly the nature and consequences of moral guilt ; while Mr. Thorpe had referred almost openly, and with a manner which there was no mistaking, to the scandalous reports that had been spread abroad in certain quarters, years ago, on the subject of Madonna's parentage. These insinuations had roused Valentine instantly. He had denounced them as false in the strongest terms he could employ ; and had left the house resolved never to hold any communication again either with Mr. Yollop or Mr. Thorpe.

About an hour after his return home, a letter marked "Private" had been brought to him from Mrs. Thorpe. The writer referred, with many expressions of sorrow, to what had occurred at the interview of the morning ; and earnestly begged Mr. Blyth to take into consideration the state of Mr. Thorpe's health, which was such, that the family doctor (who had just called) had absolutely forbidden him to excite himself in the

smallest degree by receiving any visitors, or by taking any active steps towards the recovery of his absent son. If these rules were not strictly complied with for many days to come, the doctor declared that the attack of palpitation of the heart, from which Mr. Thorpe had suffered on the night of Zack's return, might occur again, and be strengthened into a confirmed malady. As it was, if proper care were taken, nothing of an alarming nature need be apprehended.

Having referred to her husband in these terms, Mrs. Thorpe next reverted to herself. She mentioned the receipt of a letter from Zack; but said it had done little towards calming her anxiety and alarm. Feeling certain that Mr. Blyth would be the first friend her son would go to, she now begged him to use his influence to keep Zack from abandoning himself to any desperate courses, or from leaving the country, which she greatly feared he might be tempted to do. She asked this of Mr. Blyth, as a favour to herself; and hinted that if he would only enable her, by granting it, to tell her husband, without entering into any details, that their son was under safe guidance for the present, half the anxiety from which she

was now suffering would be alleviated. Here the letter ended abruptly; a request for a speedy answer being hastily added in the postscript.

“Now, Zack,” said Valentine, after he had related the result of his visit to Baregrove Square, and had faithfully reported the contents of Mrs. Thorpe’s letter, “I shall only add that whatever has happened between your father and me, makes no difference in the respect I have always felt for your mother, and in my earnest desire to do her every service in my power. I tell you fairly—as between friends—that I think you have been very much to-blame, and very—— Well! I won’t say the next word; but I will say this instead, that I have sufficient confidence and faith in you, to leave everything to be now decided by your own sense of honour, and by the affection which I am sure you feel for your mother.”

This appeal, and the narrative which had preceded it, had their due effect on Zack. His ardour for a wandering life of excitement and peril, began to cool in the quiet temperature of the good influences that were now at work within him. “It shan’t be my fault, Blyth, if I don’t

deserve your good opinion," said he, warmly. "I know I've behaved bad; and I know, too, that I have had some severe provocations. But never mind that: it's no use ripping open what's past, now. Only tell me what you advise; and I'll do it—I will, upon my honour, for my mother's sake."

"That's right! that's talking like a man!" exclaimed Valentine, clapping him on the shoulder. "Now, look here, this is what I have to recommend: in the first place, it would be no use your going back home at once—even if you were willing, which I am afraid you are not. In the state your father seems to be in now, your presence in Baregrove Square would do *him* a great deal of harm; and do *you* no good. Employed, however, you must be somehow, while you're away from home; and what you're fit for—unless it's Art—I'm sure I don't know. You have been talking a great deal about wanting to be a painter; and now is the time to test your resolution. If I get you an order to draw in the British Museum, to fill up your mornings; and if I enter you at some private Academy, to fill up your evenings (mine at home is not half

strict enough for you)—will you stick to it? No toasting muffins and talking nonsense now, you know. Real serious, steady, hard work, which I will undertake to help you through if you will only engage to exert yourself. I can propose no better plan for the present than this. Do you consent to follow it?"

"Yes, to the letter," replied Zack, resolutely dismissing his dreams of life in the wilds to the limbo of oblivion. "I ask nothing better, Blyth, than to stick to you and your plan for the future."

"Bravo!" cried Valentine, in his old, gay hearty manner. "The heaviest load of anxiety that has been on my shoulders for some time past, is off them now. Shake hands once more, Zack. I will write and comfort your mother this very afternoon——"

"Give her my love," interposed Zack.

—"Giving her your love; in the belief of course, that you are going to prove yourself worthy to send such a message," continued Mr. Blyth. "Let's turn and walk back at once. The sooner I write, the easier and happier I shall be. By the by, there's another important ques-

tion starts up now, which I had not thought of before; and which your mother seems to have forgotten in the hurry and agitation of writing her letter. What are you going to do about money matters? Have you thought about a place to live in for the present? Can I help you in any way?"

These questions admitted of but one candid form of answer, which the natural frankness of Zack's character led him to adopt without hesitation. He immediately related the whole history of his first meeting with Mr. Matthew Marksman, and of the visit to Kirk Street which had followed it that very morning.

Though in no way remarkable for excess of caution, or for the possession of any extraordinary fund of worldly wisdom, Mr. Blyth frowned and shook his head suspiciously, while he listened to the curious narrative now addressed to him. As soon as it was concluded, he expressed the most decided disapprobation of the careless readiness with which Zack had allowed a perfect stranger to become intimate with him—reminded him that he had met his new acquaintance (of whom, by his own confession, he knew next to nothing) in

a very disreputable place; and concluded by earnestly recommending him to break off all connection with so dangerous an associate, at the earliest possible opportunity.

Zack on his side, was not slow in mustering arguments to defend his conduct. He stated that Mr. Marksman had gone into the Temple of Harmony innocently, as a stranger ignorant of the real character of the place; and had been grossly insulted before he became the originator of the riot there. As to his family affairs and his real name, he might have good and proper reasons for concealing them; and this was the more probable, inasmuch as his account of himself in other respects was straightforward and unreserved enough. He might be very eccentric, and might have led an adventurous life; but it was surely not fair to condemn him on that account only, as a downright bad character. In conclusion, Zack cited the loan he had received, as a proof that the stranger could not be a swindler, at any rate; and referred to the evident familiarity with localities and customs in California, which he had shown in conversation that afternoon, as affording satisfactory

evidence in corroboration of his own statement that he had gained his money by gold-digging.

Mr. Blyth admitted that there might be some force in these arguments, but nevertheless held firmly to his original opinion; and, first offering to advance the money from his own purse, suggested that young Thorpe should relieve himself of the obligation which he had imprudently contracted, by paying back what he had borrowed, that very afternoon.

Zack replied, that, if he followed this advice, and so openly avowed the most complete distrust of his new friend, he had not the least doubt in the world that Mr. Marksman was of a temper to knock him down the moment he offered the money back; adding, in conclusion: "And, let me tell you, Blyth, he's one of the few men alive who could really do it."

Valentine shook his head; and said this was no joking matter.

Zack declared he was quite in earnest, and proceeded to illustrate the peculiarities of Mr. Marksman's character by relating a few of his friend's wildest adventures at second hand. From these he next diverged to Mat's rough kindness in

placing all his bank-notes, and his bed after that, at his visitor's disposal ; laying great stress, while relating these circumstances, on his refusal to accept any acknowledgment for the money he had lent. "I only succeeded in forcing it on him unawares," concluded young Thorpe, "by slipping it in among his bank-notes ; and, if he finds it there, I'll lay you any wager he tears it up, or throws it into the fire."

Mr. Blyth hesitated, and began to look a little puzzled. The suspicious stranger's behaviour about the money was rather staggering, to say the least of it.

"Let me bring him to your picture-show," pursued Zack. "Judge of him yourself, before you condemn him. He's the queerest and best fellow in the world : look at him and hear him talk ; and then, if you tell me to break with him, I will. Surely I can't say fairer than that?—May I bring him to see the pictures? I mentioned it in my letter, didn't I?"

"Before I answer," said Valentine, "just think again, whether it wouldn't really be better to risk offending this man, and to follow my advice."

"I should be ashamed to offend him," answered Zack. "Upon my honour, after what has passed between us, I should be ashamed to treat him as you tell me."

"Then, Zack, it seems certainly necessary—as I am in a manner answerable for you to your mother, now—that I should see this new associate of yours as soon as possible."

"Will you come at once to Kirk Street, where he lives?"

"I must write my letter to your mother before I do anything else. And then I expect Lavvie's father to come early, and drink tea with us. I might slip away, to be sure; but the poor old gentleman would think me neglectful if I left him."

"What do you say to to-morrow, then? To-morrow's Friday, you know."

"Friday's unluckily out of the question. I have a retouching job to do on an old picture, down in the country. It's at a friend's house; so I shall have to dine there, and shan't get back till the night train. No: it can't be done to-morrow."

"And the next day is the day of your picture-show."

“ Well, Zack, all things considered, you had better bring him to it as you proposed just now. But remember the distinction I always make between my public studio and my private house. I consider the glorious mission of Art to apply to everybody ; so I am proud to open my painting-room to any honest man who wants to look at my pictures. But the freedom of my other rooms is only for my own friends. I can’t have strangers I know nothing about brought up-stairs : remember that.”

“ Of course ! I shouldn’t think of it, my dear fellow. Only you look at honest old Mat, and hear him ; and I’ll answer for the rest.”

“ Zack ! Zack ! I wish you were not so dreadfully careless about whom you get acquainted with. I have often warned you that you risk bringing yourself or your friends into trouble some day, when you least expect it. Where are you going to now ?”

“ Back to Kirk Street. This is my nearest way ; and I promised Mat——”

“ Remember what you have promised *me*, and what I am going to promise your mother. Wait a moment ; I have something more to say. What

about to-morrow? I shan't be able to get you the order for the Museum by that time. How do you mean to employ the day?"

"In taking a good, long, healthy, glorious stretch into the country with Mat, who likes a tough walk as well as any man that ever trod on shoe-leather. Good-bye, dear old boy; and thank you for all you're going to do for me. I remember, and mean to keep, on my honour, every promise I have made to you. Only wait till we meet on Saturday, and you see my new friend; and you will find it all right."

"I hope I shan't find it all wrong," said Mr. Blyth, to himself forebodingly, as he followed the road to his own house.

CHAPTER V.



THE PICTURE-SHOW.

THE great day of the year in Valentine's house, was always the day on which his pictures for the Royal Academy Exhibition were shown in their completed state to friends and admiring spectators, congregated in his own painting-room. By dint of issuing invitations right and left, in all directions—on the liberal principle that anybody was welcome to his studio, without distinction of class, who wanted to look at his pictures, or who would feel complimented by being invited to see them—he invariably contrived to insure a large attendance of company, in spite of the humble position which he held in his profession. His visitors represented almost every variety of rank in the social scale; and grew numerous in proportion as they descended from the higher to the lower

degrees. Thus, the aristocracy of race was usually impersonated, in his painting-room, by his one noble patron, the Dowager Countess of Bramble-down; the aristocracy of art by two or three Royal Academicians; and the aristocracy of money by eight or ten highly respectable families, who came quite as much to look at the Dowager Countess as to look at the pictures. With these last, the select portion of the company might be said to terminate; and, after them, flowed in promiscuously the general mass, and great obscure majority of the visitors—a heterogeneous and blindly-admiring mob of minor people—a congregation of worshippers at the shrine of art, who were some of them of small importance, some of doubtful importance, some of no importance at all; and who included within their numbers, not only a sprinkling of Mr. Blyth's old-established tradesmen, but also his gardener, his wife's old nurse, the brother of his housemaid, and the father of his cook. Some of his respectable friends deplored, on principle, the "levelling tendencies" which induced him thus to admit a mixture of all classes into his painting-room, on the days when he exhibited his pictures. But Valentine

persisted, nevertheless, year after year, in choosing his visitors from the low degree as well as the high; and was warmly encouraged in taking this course by no less a person than Lady Bramble-down herself, who had once been a violent Tory, but was now an uncompromising Radical, a taker of snuff, a reviler of the Peerage, a teller of scandalous Royal anecdotes, and a worshipper of the memory of Oliver Cromwell.

On the eventful Saturday which was to display his works to an applauding public of private friends, Mr. Blyth had dressed himself in his gayest morning costume, and had entered his painting-room, to be ready to receive the visitors, a good half-hour before the most punctual people could possibly be expected to arrive. Thanks to Madonna's industry and attention, the studio looked really in perfect order—as neat and clean as a room could be. A semicircle of all the available chairs in the house—drawing-room and bed-room chairs intermingled—ranged itself symmetrically in front of the pictures. That imaginative classical landscape, “The Golden Age,” reposed grandly on its own easel; while “Columbus in Sight of the New World”—the

largest canvas Mr. Blyth had ever worked on, encased in the most gorgeous frame he had ever ordered for one of his own pictures—was hung on the wall at an easy distance from the ground, having proved too bulky to be safely accommodated by any easel in Valentine's possession.

Except Mr. Blyth's bureau, all the ordinary furniture and general litter of the room had been cleared out of it, or hidden away behind some draperies, flowing picturesquely-pendulous and slightly damaged by old paint-stains, over the lumber in one corner, which it had been found impossible to remove. Every other portion of the studio was perfectly clear from end to end; and backwards and forwards over the open space thus obtained, Mr. Blyth walked expectant, with the elastic skip peculiar to him; looking ecstasically at his pictures, as he passed and repassed them—now singing, now whistling; sometimes referring mysteriously to a small manuscript which he carried in his hand, jauntily tied round with blue ribbon; sometimes following the lines of the composition in "Columbus," by flourishing his mahl-stick before it in the air, with dreamy artistic grace;—always, turn where he would,

instinct from top to toe with an excitable activity which defied the very idea of rest—and always hospitably ready to rush to the door and receive the first enthusiastic visitor with open arms, at a moment's notice.

Above stairs, in "Lavvie's drawing-room," the scene was of a different kind. Here also the arrival of the expected visitors was an event of importance; but it was awaited in perfect tranquillity and silence. Mrs. Blyth lay in her usual position on the couch side of the bed, turning over a small portfolio of engravings; and Madonna stood at the front window, where she could command a full view of the garden gate, and of the approach from it to the house. This was always her place on the days when the pictures were shown; for, while occupying this position, she was able, by signs, to indicate the arrival of the different guests to her adopted mother, who lay too far from the window to see them. On all other days of the year, it was Mrs. Blyth who devoted herself to Madonna's service, by interpreting for her advantage the pleasant conversations that she could not hear. On this day, it was Madonna who devoted herself to Mrs. Blyth's

service, by identifying for her amusement the visitors whose approach up the garden walk she could not safely leave her bed to see.

No privilege that the girl enjoyed under Valentine's roof was more valued by her than this, for by the exercise of it, she was enabled to make some slight return in kind for the affectionate attention of which she was the constant object. Mrs. Blyth always encouraged her to indicate who the different guests were, as they followed each other, by signs of her own choosing, that were almost invariably suggested by some habitual gesture, or other characteristic peculiarity of the person represented, which her quick observation had detected at a first interview, and which she copied with the quaintest exactness of imitation. The correctness with which her memory preserved these signs, and retained, after long intervals, the recollection of the persons to whom they alluded, was very extraordinary. The name of any mere acquaintance, who came seldom to the house, she constantly forgot, having only perhaps had it interpreted to her once or twice, and not hearing it as others did, whenever it accidentally occurred in conversation. But if the sign by which she

herself had once designated that acquaintance—no matter how long ago—happened to be repeated by those about her, it was then always found that the forgotten person was recalled to her recollection immediately.

From eleven till three had been notified in the invitation cards as the time during which the pictures would be on view. It was now long past ten. Madonna still stood patiently by the window, going on with a new purse which she was knitting for Valentine; and looking out attentively now and then towards the road. Mrs. Blyth, humming a tune to herself, slowly turned over the engravings in her portfolio, and became so thoroughly absorbed in looking at them, that she forgot altogether how time was passing, and was quite astonished to hear Madonna suddenly clap her hands at the window, as a signal that the first punctual visitor had passed the garden-gate.

Mrs. Blyth raised her eyes from the prints directly, and smiled as she saw the girl puckering up her fresh, rosy face into a childish imitation of old age, bending her light figure gravely in a succession of formal bows, and kissing her hand several times with extreme suavity and delibera-

tion. These signs were meant to indicate the poor engraver, whose old-fashioned habit it was to pay homage to all his friends among the ladies, by saluting them from afar off with tremulous bows and gallant kissings of the hand.

“Ah!” thought Mrs. Blyth, nodding, to show that she understood the signs. “Ah! there’s father. I felt sure he would be the first; and I know exactly what he will do when he gets in. He will admire the pictures more than anybody, and have a better opinion to give of them than anybody else has; but before he can mention a word of it to Valentine, there will be dozens of people in the painting-room, and then he will get taken suddenly nervous, and come up here to me.”

While Mrs. Blyth was thinking about her father, Madonna signalised the advent of two more visitors. First, she raised her hand sharply, and began pulling at an imaginary whisker on her own smooth cheek—then stood bolt upright, and folded her arms majestically over her bosom. Mrs. Blyth immediately recognised the originals of these two pantomime portrait-sketches. The one represented Mr. Hemlock, a small critic of a small newspaper, who was principally remarkable for

never letting his whiskers alone for five minutes together. The other portrayed Mr. Bullivant, the aspiring fair-haired sculptor, who wrote poetry, and studied dignity in his attitudes so unremittingly, that he could not even stop to look in at a shop-window, without standing before it as if he was his own statue.

In a minute or two more, Mrs. Blyth heard a prodigious grating of wheels, and trampling of horses, and banging of carriage-steps violently let down. Madonna immediately took a seat on the nearest chair, rolled the skirt of her dress up into her lap, tucked both her hands inside it, then drew one out, and imitated the action of snuff-taking—looking up merrily at Mrs. Blyth, as much as to say, “You can’t mistake that, I think?”—Impossible! old Lady Brambledown, with her muff and snuff-box, to the very life.

Close on the Dowager Countess followed a visitor of low degree. Madonna—looking as if she was a little afraid of the boldness of her own imitation—began chewing an imaginary quid of tobacco; then pretended to pull it suddenly out of her mouth, and throw it away behind her. It was all over in a moment; but it represented to

perfection Mangles, the gardener ; who, though an inveterate chewer of tobacco, always threw away his quid whenever he confronted his betters, as a duty that he owed to his own respectability.

Another carriage. Madonna put on a suppositious pair of spectacles, pretended to pull them off, rub them bright, and put them on again ; then, retiring a little from the window, spread out her dress into the widest dimensions that it could be made to assume. The new arrivals thus portrayed, were the doctor, whose glasses were never clean enough to please him ; and the doctor's wife, an emaciated fine lady, who deceitfully suggested the presence of vanished charms, by wearing a balloon under her gown—which benevolent female rumour pronounced to be only a crinoline petticoat.

Here there was a brief pause in the procession of visitors. Mrs. Blyth beckoned to Madonna, and began talking on her fingers.

“ No signs of Zack yet—are there, love ? ”

The girl looked anxiously towards the window, and shook her head.

“ If he ventures up here, when he does come, we must not be so kind to him as usual. He has

been behaving very badly, and we must see if we can't make him ashamed of himself."

Madonna's colour rose directly. She looked amazed, sorry, perplexed, and incredulous by turns. Zack behaving badly?—she would never believe it!

"*I shall try if I can't give it to him!*" pursued Mrs. Blyth.

"*And I shall try if I can't console him afterwards,*" thought Madonna, turning away her head for fear her face should betray her.

Here there was another ring at the bell. "There he is, perhaps," continued Mrs. Blyth, nodding in the direction of the window, as she signed these words.

Madonna ran to look : then turned round, and with a comic air of disappointment, hooked her thumbs in the arm-holes of an imaginary waist-coat. Only Mr. Gimble, the picture-dealer, who always criticised works of art with his hands in that position.

Just then, a soft knock sounded at Mrs. Blyth's door ; and her father entered, sniffing with that perpetual cold of his which nothing could cure—bowing, kissing his hand, and frightened up-stairs

by the company, just as his daughter had predicted.

“Oh, Lavvie! the Dowager Countess is down-stairs, and her ladyship likes the pictures,” exclaimed the old man, snuffling and smiling in an infirm flutter of nervous glee.

“Come and sit down by me, father, and see Madonna doing the visitors. It’s funnier than any play that ever was acted.”

“And her ladyship likes the pictures,” repeated the engraver, his poor old watery eyes almost sparkling with pleasure as he told his little morsel of good news over again, and sat down by the bedside of his favourite child.

The rings at the bell began to multiply at compound interest. Madonna was hardly still at the window for a moment, so many were the visitors whose approach up the garden-walk it was now necessary for her to signalise. Down-stairs, all the vacant seats left in the painting-room were filling rapidly; and the ranks of standers in the back places were getting two-deep already.

There was Lady Brambledown (whose calls at the studio always lasted the whole morning), sitting in the centre, or place of honour, taking

snuff fiercely, talking liberal sentiments in a cracked voice, and apparently feeling extreme pleasure in making the respectable families stare at her in reverent amazement. There were two Royal Academicians—a saturnine Academician, swaddled in a voluminous cloak, who stared at the pictures with a speechless pertinacity which quietly annihilated them as works of art—and a benevolent Academician with an umbrella, who, not being able conscientiously to praise either “Columbus” or “The Golden Age,” and being a great deal too fond of Valentine to blame them, compromised the matter by waving his hand vaguely before the pictures, and saying from time to time: “Yes, yes; ah! yes, yes, yes.” There were the doctor and his wife, who admired the massive frame of “Columbus,” but said not a word about the picture itself. There were M. Bullivant, the sculptor, and Mr. Hemlock, the journalist, exchanging solemnly that sort of critical small talk, in which such words as “sensuous,” “æsthetic,” “objective,” and “subjective,” occupy prominent places, and out of which no man ever has succeeded, or ever will succeed, in extricating an idea. There was Mr. Gimble, fluently laudatory, with the whole

alphabet of Art-Jargon at his fingers' ends, but with not the slightest vestige of comprehension of the subject, either in theory or practice. There were some respectable families who tried to understand the pictures, and could not. There were other respectable families who never tried at all, but confined themselves exclusively to the Dowager Countess. There were the obscure general visitors, who more than made up in enthusiasm what they wanted in distinction. And, finally, there was the absolute democracy, or downright low-life party among the spectators, represented for the time being, by Mr. Blyth's gardener, and Mr. Blyth's cook's father; who, standing together modestly outside the door, agreed in awe-struck whispers, that the "Golden Age" was a Tasty Thing, and "Columbus in sight of the New World," a Beautiful Piece.

All Valentine's restlessness before the visitors arrived was as nothing compared with his rapacious activity, now that they were fairly assembled. Not once had he stood still, or ceased talking since the first spectator entered the room. And not once, probably, would he have permitted either his legs or his tongue to take the slightest

repose until the last guest had departed from the Studio, but for Lady Brambledown, who accidentally hit on the only available means of fixing his attention to one thing, and keeping him comparatively quiet in one place.

“I say, Blyth,” cried her ladyship (she never prefixed the word “Mister” to the names of any of her male friends.) “I say, Blyth, I can’t for the life of me understand your picture of Columbus yet. You talked some time ago about explaining it in detail. When are you going to begin?”

“Directly, my dear madam, directly: I was only waiting till the room got well filled,” answered Valentine, taking up his mahl-stick, and producing the manuscript tied round with blue ribbon. “The fact is—I don’t know whether you mind it?—I have just thrown together a few thoughts on art, as a sort of introduction to—to Columbus, in short; which, I feel, wants more explaining than my pictures usually do. They are written down on this paper—the thoughts are. Would anybody be kind enough to read them, while I point out what they mean on the picture? I only ask, because it seems egotistical somehow

to be reading my opinions about my own works.—Will anybody be kind enough?” repeated Mr. Blyth, walking all along the semicircle of chairs, and politely offering his manuscript to anybody who would take it.

Not a hand was held out. Bashfulness is sometimes infectious; and it proved to be so on this particular occasion.

“Nonsense, Blyth!” exclaimed Lady Bramble-down. “Read it yourself. Egotistical? Stuff! Everybody’s egotistical. I hate modest men; they’re all rascals. Read it, and assert your own importance. You have a better right to do so than most of your neighbours, for you belong to the aristocracy of talent—the only aristocracy, in my opinion, worth a straw.” Here her ladyship took a pinch of snuff, and looked at the respectable families, as much as to say:—There! what do you think of that from a Dowager Countess?

Thus encouraged, Valentine took his station beneath “Columbus,” and unrolled the manuscript.

“What a very peculiar man Mr. Blyth is!” whispered one of the lady visitors to an acquaintance behind her.

“And what a very unusual mixture of people he seems to have asked!” rejoined the other, looking towards the doorway, where the democracy loomed diffident in Sunday clothes.

“The pictures which I have the honour to exhibit,” began Valentine from the manuscript, have been painted on a principle ——”

“I beg your pardon, Blyth,” interrupted Lady Brambledown, whose sharp ears had caught the remark made on Valentine and his “mixture of people,” and whose liberal principles were thereby instantly stimulated into publicly asserting themselves. “I beg your pardon ; but where’s my old ally, the gardener, who was here last time?—Out at the door is he? What does he mean by not coming in? Here, gardener! come behind my chair.” (The gardener approached, internally writhing under the honour of public notice, and covered with confusion in consequence of the noise his boots made on the floor). “How do you do? and how are your family? What did you stop out at the door for? You’re one of Mr. Blyth’s guests, and have as much right inside as any of the rest of us. Stand there, and listen, and look about you, and inform your mind. This

is an age of progress, gardener; your class is coming uppermost, and time it did too. Go on, Blyth." And again the Dowager Countess took a pinch of snuff, looking disparagingly at the lady who had spoken of the "mixture of people."

"—— have been painted on a principle," continued Valentine, "which may be briefly explained thus:—I take the liberty of dividing all art into two great classes, the landscape subjects, and the figure subjects; and I venture to describe these classes, in their highest development, under the respective titles of Art Pastoral and Art Mystic. The 'Golden Age' is an attempt to exemplify Art Pastoral. 'Columbus in sight of the New World' is an effort to express myself in Art Mystic. In landscape," (everybody looked at the 'Golden Age') "Art Pastoral is only, I think, to be attained by taking Nature merely as a foundation, and building up upon it an airy Ideal, which shall elevate the mind, and diffuse sublime poetry and philosophy over laborious Reality, which cannot be said to diffuse anything but itself. As an instance, in the picture now favoured by your notice" (Mr. Blyth waved his mahl-stick persuasively towards the 'Golden Age')

—"you have in the foreground-bushes, the middle-distance trees, the horizon mountains, and the superincumbent sky, what I would fain hope is a tolerably faithful transcript of mere nature. But in the group of buildings to the right" (here the cane touched the architectural city, with its acres of steps and forests of pillars), "in the dancing nymphs, and the musing philosopher" (Mr. Blyth rapped that sage briskly on the head with the padded end of his mahl-stick), "you have the Ideal—the elevating poetical view of ordinary things, like cities, happy female peasants, and thoughtful spectators. Thus nature is exalted; and thus the diffusion to which I have briefly alluded, takes place." Here Valentine paused at the end of a paragraph; and the gardener made an abortive effort to get back to the doorway.

"Capital, Blyth!" cried Lady Brambledown. "Liberal, comprehensive, progressive, profound. Gardener, don't fidget!"

"The true philosophy of art—the true philosophy of art, my lady," added Mr. Gimble, the picture-dealer.

"Crude?" said Mr. Hemlock, the critic,

appealing confidentially to Mr. Bullivant, the sculptor.

“What?” inquired that gentleman.

“Blyth’s principles of criticism,” answered Mr. Hemlock.

“Oh, yes! extremely so,” said Mr. Bullivant.

“Having glanced at Art Pastoral, as attempted in the ‘Golden Age,’” pursued Valentine, turning over a leaf, “I will now, with your permission, proceed to Art Mystic and ‘Columbus.’ Art Mystic, I would briefly endeavour to define, as aiming at the illustration of fact on the highest imaginative principles. It takes a scene, for instance, from history—sacred, or profane, no matter which—and represents that scene as exactly and naturally as possible. And here the ordinary thinker might be apt to say, Art Mystic has done enough.” (“So it has,” muttered Mr. Hemlock.) “On the contrary, Art Mystic has only begun. Besides the representation of the scene itself, the spirit of the age”—(“Ah! quite right,” said Lady Brambledown; “yes, yes, the spirit of the age.”)—“the spirit of the age which produced that scene, and the prophetic foreshortening—I beg your pardon, I mean fore-

shadowing—prophetic foreshadowing of future periods, must also be indicated, mystically, by the introduction of those angelic or infernal winged forms—those cherubs and airy female geniuses; those demons and dragons of darkness—which so many illustrious painters have long since taught us to recognise as impersonating to the eye the good and evil influences, Virtue and Vice, Glory and Shame, Success and Failure, Past and Future, Heaven and Earth—all on the same canvas.” Here, Mr. Blyth stopped again: this passage had cost him some trouble, and he was secretly proud of it.

“Glorious!” cried enthusiastic Mr. Gimble.

“Turgid,” muttered critical Mr. Hemlock.

“Very,” assented compliant Mr. Bullivant.

“Go on—get to the picture—don’t stop so often,” said Lady Brambledown. “Bless my soul, how the man *does* fidget!” This was not directed at Valentine (who, however, richly deserved it), but at the unhappy gardener, who had made a second attempt to escape to the sheltering obscurity of the doorway, and had been betrayed by his boots.

“To exemplify what has just been remarked,

by the picture at my side," proceeded Mr. Blyth. "The moment sought to be represented is sunrise on the 12th of October, 1492, when the great Columbus first saw land clearly at the end of his voyage. Observe now, in the upper portions of the composition, how the mystical illustration of the spirit of the age, and the symbolical prophecy of future events, to which I have referred, are developed before the spectator. Of the two winged female figures hovering in the morning clouds, immediately over Columbus and his ship, the one is the Spirit of Discovery, holding the orb of the world in her left hand, and pointing with a laurel crown (typical of Columbus's fame) in her right hand, towards the newly-discovered Continent. The other figure symbolises the Spirit of Royal Patronage, impersonated by being a portrait of Queen Isabella, Columbus's warm friend and patron, who offered her jewels to pay his expenses, and who, throughout his perilous voyage, was with him in spirit as here represented. The tawny figure with feathered head, floating hair, and wildly-extended pinions, soaring upward from the western horizon, represents the Genius of America advancing to meet her great discoverer ;

while the shadowy countenances, looming dimly through the morning mist behind her, are portrait-types of Washington and Franklin, the patriot preservers of America, who would never have been given to it if that continent had not been discovered, and who are here, therefore, associated prophetically with the first voyagers from the Old World to the New."

Pausing once more, Mr. Blyth used his explanatory mahl-stick freely on the persons of the Spirit of Discovery, the Spirit of Royal Patronage, and the Genius of America—not forgetting an indicative knock a-piece for the embryo physiognomies of Washington and Franklin. Everybody's eyes followed the progress of the stick vacantly; and everybody's opinion was that Art Mystic, as impersonated on Mr. Blyth's canvas, must be a very tremendous intellectual job—always, however, excepting Mr. Hemlock, who frowned, and whispered—"Bosh!" to Mr. Bullivant; who smiled, and whispered—"Quite so," to Mr. Hemlock.

"Let me now ask your attention," resumed Valentine, "to the same mystic style of treatment, as carried from the sky into the sea. Writhing

defeated behind Columbus's ship, in the depths of the transparent Atlantic, you have shadowy types of the difficulties and enemies that the dauntless navigator had to contend with. Crushed headlong into the waters, sinks first the Spirit of Superstition, delineated by monastic robes—the council of monks having set itself against Columbus from the very first. Behind the Spirit of Superstition, and impersonated by a fillet of purple grapes around her head, descends the Genius of Portugal—the Portuguese having repulsed Columbus, and having treacherously sent out frigates to stop his discovery by taking him prisoner. The scaly forms entwined around these two, represent Envy, Hatred, Malice, Ignorance, and Crime generally; and thus the mystic element is, so to speak, led through the sea out of the picture.”

(Another pause: everybody appearing to be unaccountably relieved by this announcement of the final departure of the mystic element.)

“All that now remains to be noticed,” continued Mr. Blyth, “is the central portion of the composition, which is occupied by Columbus and his ships, and which represents the scene as it

may actually be supposed to have occurred. Here we get to Reality, and to that sort of correctly-imitative art which is simple enough to explain itself. As a proof of this, let me point attention to the rig of the ships, the actions of the sailors, and, more than all, Columbus himself. There he stands stretching out his arms rapturously on the high stern of his vessel. His cloak has fallen from his shoulders, and has left his trunk, or 'Torso,' clothed only in a tight-fitting chamoy leather jerkin, rusty with age, which I have adopted as indicative of the poverty of his circumstances at that period. It may not perhaps appear at first sight, that weeks of the most laborious consultation of authorities of which the artist is capable, have been expended over the impersonation of that one figure. Yet so it has been ; for so only can be obtained that faithful representation of individual character, which it is my earnest desire to combine with the higher or mystic element. One instance of this fidelity to Nature I may perhaps be permitted to point out in the person of Columbus, in conclusion. First, however, let me remind you that this great man went to sea at the age of fourteen, and cast

himself freely into all the hardships of nautical life ; next, let me beg you to enter into my train of thought, and consider these hardships as naturally comprising, among other things, industrious haulings at ropes and manful tuggings at long oars ; and, finally, let me now direct your attention to the manner in which the muscular system of the famous navigator is developed about the arms in anatomical harmony with this idea. Follow my mahl-stick closely, and observe the rotund vigour of years of athletic exertion, expressed in Columbus's *Biceps Flexor Cubiti*——."

"Mercy on us ! what's a *Biceps* ?" cried Lady Brambledown.

"The *Biceps Flexor Cubiti*, your ladyship," began the Doctor, delighted to pour professional information into the mind of a Dowager Countess, "may be literally interpreted as the Two-Headed Bender of the Elbow, and is a muscle situated on, what we term, the Os——"

"Follow the mahl-stick, my dear madam, pray follow the mahl-stick ! This is the *Biceps*," interrupted Valentine, tapping till the canvas quivered again, on the upper part of Columbus's

arms, which appeared to be in a sadly swollen condition under their tight-fitting chamoy leather sleeves. "The *Biceps*, Lady Brambledown, is a tremendously strong muscle——"

"Which arises in the human body, your Ladyship," interposed the Doctor, "by two heads——"

"Which is used," continued Valentine, cutting him short—"I beg your pardon, Doctor, but this is important—which is used——"

"I beg yours," rejoined the Doctor, testily. "The Origin of the muscle, or place where it arises, is the first thing to be described. The Use comes afterwards. It is an axiom of Anatomical Science——"

"But, my dear sir!" cried Valentine——

"No," said the Doctor, peremptorily; "you must really excuse me. This is a professional point. If I allow erroneous explanations of the muscular system to pass unchecked in my presence——"

"I don't want to make any!" cried Mr. Blyth, gesticulating violently in the direction of Columbus. "I only want to——"

"To describe the use of a muscle before you describe the place of its origin in the human

body," persisted the Doctor.—"No, my dear sir! I can't sanction it. No, indeed! I really *can* not sanction it!"

"Will you let me say two words?" asked Valentine.

"Two hundred thousand, my good sir, on any other subject," assented the Doctor, with a sarcastic smile; "but on *this* subject——"

"On Art?" shouted Mr. Blyth, with a tap on Columbus, which struck a sound from the canvas like a thump on a muffled drum. "On Art, Doctor? I only want to say, that as Columbus's early life must have exercised him considerably in hauling ropes and pulling oars, I have shown the large development of his *Biceps* muscle (which is principally used in those actions) through his sleeves, as a good characteristic point to insist on in his physical formation.—That's all! As to the origin——"

"The origin of the *Biceps Flexor Cubiti*, your Ladyship," resumed the pertinacious Doctor, "is by two heads. The first begins, if I may so express myself, *tendinous*——"

"That man is a pedantic jackass," whispered Mr. Hemlock to his friend.

“And yet he hasn’t a bad head for a bust !” rejoined Mr. Bullivant.

— “Tendinous, your Ladyship,” continued the Doctor, “from the glenoid cavity of the scapula ; the scapula signifying——”

“Pray, Mr. Blyth,” said the polite and ever-admiring Mr. Gimble—“pray let me beg you, in the name of the company, to proceed with your most interesting and suggestive explanations and views on Art !”

— “Signifying, or meaning, the under part of the shoulder, your Ladyship,” proceeded the Doctor, “or shoulder-blade. And the glenoid cavity being in point of fact——”

“Indeed, Mr. Gimble,” said Valentine, “I am very much delighted and gratified by your approval ; but I have nothing more to read. I thought that little point about Columbus, a good point to leave off with ; and considered that I might safely allow the rest of the picture to explain itself to the intelligent spectator.”

Hearing this, some of the spectators, possibly distrusting their own intelligence, rose to take leave—new visitors making their appearance, however, to fill the vacant chairs and receive

Mr. Blyth's hearty welcome. Meanwhile through all the bustle of departing and arriving friends, and through all the fast-strengthening hum of general talk, the voice of the unyielding doctor still murmured solemnly of "capsular ligaments," "adjacent tendons," and "corracoid processes" to Lady Brambledown; who listened to him with satirical curiosity, as a species of polite medical buffoon that it rather amused her to be become acquainted with.

Among the guests whom Valentine now advanced to receive at his painting-room door, were two whom he had expected to see at a much earlier period of the day—Mr. Marksman and Zack.

"How late you are," said he, as he shook hands with young Thorpe.

"I wish I could have come earlier, my dear fellow," answered Zack, rather importantly; "but I had some business to do," (he had been taking his watch out of pawn;) "and my friend here, had some business to do also," (Mr. Marksman had been toasting red herrings for an early dinner;) "and so somehow we couldn't get here before. Mat, let me introduce you.

This is my old friend, Mr. Blyth, whom I told you of."

Valentine had barely time to take the hand Mr. Marksman held out to him, and say something polite, before his attention was claimed by fresh visitors. Young Thorpe did the honours of the house, and took his new associate into the painting-room. "Lots of people, as I told you. My friend's a great artist," whispered Zack, wondering, as he spoke, whether the peculiar scene of civilised life now displayed before Mr. Marksman would at all tend to upset his barbarian self-possession.

No: not in the least. There stood Mat, just as grave, cool, and quietly observant of things about him as ever. Neither the pictures, nor the company, nor the staring of many eyes that wondered at his black skull-cap and scarred swarthy face, were capable of disturbing the Olympian serenity of this Jupiter of the back-woods.

"There!" said Zack, pointing triumphantly across the room to "Columbus;" "What do you think of that? Can you guess what that is a picture of; eh, Mat?"

Mr. Marksman attentively and deliberately

surveyed the figure of Columbus, the rig of his ship, and the wings of the typical female spirits, hovering overhead in the morning clouds—thought a little—then answered, in a grave and low voice :

“Peter Wilkins, taking a voyage along with his flying wives.”

Zack pulled out his handkerchief, and stifled his laughter as well as he could, out of consideration for Mat; who, however, took not the smallest notice of him, but added, still staring intently at the picture :

“Peter Wilkins was the only book I had, when I was a lad aboard ship. I used to read it over and over again, at odds and ends of spare time, till I pretty nigh got it by heart. That was many a year ago; and a good lot of what I knowed then, I don’t know now. But, mind ye, it’s my belief that Peter Wilkins was something of a sailor.”

“Well?” whispered Zack, humouring him for the fun of the thing, “suppose he was, what of that?”

“Do you think a man as was anything of a sailor would ever be fool enough to put to sea in

such a craft as that?" asked Mr. Marksman, pointing scornfully to Columbus's ship.

"Hush! old Rough and Tough: the picture hasn't anything to do with Peter Wilkins," said Zack. "Keep quiet, and wait here a minute for me. There are some friends of mine at the other end of the room, that I must go and speak to. And, I say, Mat, if Blyth comes up to you and asks you about the picture, say it's Columbus, and devilish like him."

Left by himself, Mr. Marksman looked about him for better standing-room than he then happened to occupy; and seeing a vacant space left between the door-post and Mr. Blyth's bureau, retreated to it. Putting his hands in his pockets, he leaned comfortably against the wall, and began to examine the room and everything in it, at his leisure. It was not long, however, before he was disturbed. One of his neighbours, seeing that his back was against a large paper sketch nailed on the wall behind him, told him bluntly that he was doing mischief there, and made him change his position. He moved accordingly to the door-post; but even here, he was not left in repose. A fresh relay of visitors

arrived, and obliged him to make way for them to pass into the room—which he did by politely rolling himself round the door-post, into the passage.

As he disappeared in this way, Mr. Blyth bustled up to the place where he had been standing and received his guests there, with great cordiality, but also with some appearance of flurry and perplexity of mind. The fact was, that Lady Brambledown, (who had a habit of remembering that she wanted something, exactly at the time when it was most inconvenient to gratify her wishes,) had just called to mind that she had not examined Valentine's works yet, through one of those artistic tubes which effectively concentrate the rays of light on a picture, when applied to the eye. Knowing, by former experience, that the studio was furnished with one of these little instruments, her ladyship now intimated her ardent desire to use it instantly on "Columbus." Valentine promised to get it, with his usual ready politeness; but he had not the slightest idea where it actually was, for all that. Among the litter of small things that had been cleared out of the way, when the painting-room was put in

order, there were several which he vaguely remembered having huddled together for safety in the bottom of his bureau. The tube might possibly have been among them, so in this place he determined to look for it—being quite ignorant, if the search turned out unsuccessful, where he ought to look next.

After begging the new visitors to walk in, he opened the bureau, which was very large and old-fashioned, with a little bright key hanging by a chain that he unhooked from his watch-guard ; and began searching inside amid infinite confusion—all his attention concentrated in the effort to discover the lost tube. It was not to be found in the bottom of the bureau. He next looked, after a little preliminary hesitation, into a long narrow drawer opening beneath some pigeon-hole recesses at the back. The tube was not there ; and he shut the drawer to again, carefully and gently—for inside it was the Hair Bracelet that had belonged to Madonna's mother, lying *on* the white handkerchief, which had also been taken from the dead woman's pocket. Just as he closed the drawer, he heard footsteps at his right hand, and turned in that direction rather

suspiciously—locking down the lid of the bureau as he looked round. It was only the civil Mr. Gimble, wanting to know what Mr. Blyth was searching for, and whether he could help him. Valentine mentioned the loss of the tube; and Mr. Gimble immediately volunteered to make one of paste-board. “Ten thousand thanks,” said Mr. Blyth, hooking the key to his watch-guard again, as he returned to Lady Brambledown with his friend. “Ten thousand thanks; but the worst of it is, I don’t know where to find the pasteboard.”

If, instead of turning to the right hand to speak to Mr. Gimble, Valentine had turned to the left, he would have seen that, just as he opened the bureau and began to search in it, Mr. Marksman finding the way into the painting-room clear once more, had rolled himself quietly round the door-post again; and had then, just as quietly, bent forward a little so as to look sideways into the bureau, with those observant eyes of his which nothing could escape, and which had been trained by his old Indian experience to be always unscrupulously at work, watching something. Little did Mr. Blyth think, as he walked away, talking

with Mr. Gimble, and carefully hooking his key on to its swivel again, that Zack's strange friend had seen as much of the inside of the bureau as he had seen of it himself.

"He shut up his big box uncommon sharp, when that smilin' little chap come near him," thought Mr. Marksman. "And yet there didn't seem nothing in it that strangers mightn't see. There wasn't no money there—at least none that *I* set eyes on. But it is not my business. Let's have another look at the picter."

In the affairs of art, as in other matters, important discoveries are sometimes made, and great events occasionally accomplished, by very ignoble agencies. Mat's deplorable ignorance of Painting in general, and grossly illiterate misunderstanding of the subject represented by Columbus in particular, seemed to mark him out as the last man in the world who could possibly be associated with Art Mystic in the character of a guardian genius. Yet such was the proud position which he was now actually selected by Fate to occupy. In plain words, Mr. Blyth's greatest historical work—his wonderful "Columbus" itself—had been for some little time in imminent danger of

destruction by falling; and Mat's "look at the picter," was the all-important look which enabled him to be the first person in the room who perceived that it was in peril.

The eye with which Mr. Marksman now regarded the picture was certainly the eye of a barbarian. but the eye with which he afterwards examined the supports by which it was suspended, was the eye of a sailor, and of a good practical carpenter to boot. He saw directly, that one of the two iron clamps to which the frame-lines of "Columbus" were attached, had been carelessly driven into a part of the wall that was not strong enough to hold it against the downward stress of the heavy frame. Little warning dribblets of loosened plaster had been trickling down rapidly behind the canvas; but nobody heard them fall in the general buzz of talking; and nobody noticed the thin, fine crack above the iron clamp, which was now lengthening stealthily minute by minute.

"Just let me by, will you?" said Mr. Marksman quietly to some of his neighbours. "I want to stop those flying women and the man in the crank ship from coming down by the long run."

Dozens of alarmed ladies and gentlemen started

up from their chairs. Mat pushed through them unceremoniously ; and was indebted to his want of politeness for being in time to save the picture. With a grating crack, and an accompanying descent of a perfect slab of plaster, the loose clamp came clean out of the wall, just as Mr. Marksman seized the unsupported end and side of the frame in his sturdy hands, and so prevented the picture from taking the fatal swing downwards, which would have infallibly torn it from the remaining fastening, and precipitated it on the chairs beneath.

A tremendous confusion and clamouring of tongues ensued ; Mr. Blyth being louder, wilder, and more utterly useless in the present emergency than any of his neighbours. Mat, cool as ever, kept his hold of the picture ; and, taking no notice of the confused advice and cumbersome help offered to him, called to Zack to fetch a ladder, or, failing that, to “get a hoist” on some chairs, and cut the rope from the clamp that remained firm. Wooden steps, as young Thorpe knew, were usually kept in the painting-room. Where had they been removed to now ? Mr. Blyth’s memory was lost altogether in his excitement. Zack made a spe-

culative dash at the flowing draperies which concealed the lumber in one corner, and dragged out the steps in triumph. "All right; take your time, young 'un: there's a knife in my left-hand breeches' pocket," said Mat. "Now then, cut away at that bit of rope's-end, and hold on tight at top, while I lower away at bottom. Steady! Take it easy, and—there you are!" With which words, Mr. Marksman left the picture resting safely on the floor, and began to shake his coat-tails free of the plaster that had dropped on them.

"My dear sir! you have saved the finest picture I ever painted," cried Valentine, warmly seizing him by both hands. "I can't find words to express my gratitude and admiration——"

"Don't worry yourself about that," answered Mr. Marksman; "I don't suppose I should understand you if you *could* find 'em. If you want the picter put up again, I'll do it. And if you want the carpenter's muddle-head punched, who put it up before, I shouldn't much mind doing that too," added Mat, looking at the hole from which the clamp had been torn with an expression of the profoundest workmanlike disgust.

A new commotion in the room—near the door

this time—prevented Mr. Blyth from giving an immediate answer to the two friendly propositions just submitted to him.

At the first alarm of danger, all the ladies—headed by the Dowager Countess, in whom the instinct of self-preservation was largely developed, had got as far away as they could from the falling picture, before they ventured to look round at the process by which it was at last safely landed on the floor. Just as this had been accomplished, Lady Brambledown—who stood nearest to the doorway—caught sight of Madonna in the passage that led to it. Mrs. Blyth had heard the noise and confusion downstairs, and finding that her bell was not answered by the servants, and that it was next to impossible to overcome her father's nervous horror of confronting the company alone, had sent Madonna down-stairs with him, to assist in finding out what had happened in the studio.

While descending the stairs with her old companion, the girl had anticipated that they might easily discover whether anything was amiss, without going further than the passage, by merely peeping through the studio door. But all chance of escaping the ordeal of the painting-room was

lost the moment Lady Brambledown set eyes on her. The Dowager Countess had always been one of Madonna's warmest admirers; and now expressed that admiration by pouncing on her with immense affection and enthusiasm from the painting-room door-way. Other people, to whom the deaf and dumb girl was a much more interesting sight than "Columbus," or the "Golden Age," crowded round her; all trying together, with great amiability and small intelligence, to explain what had happened by signs which no human being could possibly understand. Fortunately for Madonna, Zack (who ever since he had cut the picture down had been assailed by an incessant fire of questions about Mr. Marksman from dozens of inquisitive gentlemen) happened to look towards her, over the ladies' heads, and came directly to explain, by signs that she could comprehend, the danger from which "Columbus" had escaped. She tried hard to get away, and bear the intelligence to Mrs. Blyth; but Lady Brambledown, feeling amiably unwilling to resign her too soon, pitched on the poor engraver standing tremulous in the passage, as being quite clever enough to carry a message up-stairs, and

sent him off to take the latest news from the studio to his daughter immediately.

Thus it was that when Mr. Blyth left Zack's friend to see what was going on near the door, he found Madonna in the painting-room, surrounded by sympathising and admiring ladies. The first words of explanation by which Lady Bramble-down answered his mute look of enquiry, reminded him of the anxiety and alarm that his wife must have suffered; and he ran up-stairs directly, promising to be back again in a minute or two.

Mr. Marksman carelessly followed Valentine to the group at the doorway—carelessly looked over some ladies' bonnets—and saw Madonna, offering her slate to the Dowager Countess at that moment.

The sweet feminine gentleness and youthful softness of the girl's face, looked inexpressibly lovely, as she now stood shy and confused under the eager eyes that were all gazing on her. Her dress, too, had never more powerfully aided the natural attractions of her face and figure by its own loveable charms of simplicity and modesty, than now, when the plain grey merino gown, and neat little black silk apron that she always wore,

were contrasted with the fashionable frippery of fine colours shining all around her. Was the rough Mr. Marksman himself lured at first sight into acknowledging her influence? If he was, his face and manner showed it very strangely.

Almost at the instant when his eye fell on her, that clay-cold change which had altered the colour of his swarthy cheeks in the hosier's shop at Dibbledean, passed over them again. The first amazed look that he cast on her, slowly darkened, while his eyes rested on her face, into a fixed, heavy, vacant stare of susperstitious awe. He never moved, he hardly seemed to breathe, until the head of a person before him accidentally intercepted his view. Then he stepped back a few paces; looked about him bewildered, as if he had forgotten where he was; whispered to himself once again that name of "Mary," which the tobacconist's wife had heard him muttering in his heavy sleep; and turned quickly towards the door, as if resolved to leave the room immediately.

But there was some inexplicable influence at work in his heart that drew him back, in spite of his own will. He retraced his steps to the group round Madonna—looked at her once more—and,

from that moment, never lost sight of her till she went up stairs again. Whichever way her face turned, he followed the direction, outside the circle, so as to be always in front of it. When Valentine re-appeared in the studio, and Madonna besought him by a look, to set her free from general admiration, and send her back to Mrs. Blyth, Mat was watching her over the painter's shoulder. And when young Thorpe—who had devoted himself to helping her in communicating with the visitors, nodded to her as she left the room, Mr. Marksman was close behind him.

CHAPTER VI.

THE FINDING OF THE CLUE.

MR. BLYTH's friends, now that their common centre of attraction had disappeared, either dispersed again in the painting-room, or approached the door to take their departure. Zack, turning round sharply after Madonna had left the studio, encountered his queer companion, who had not stirred an inch while other people were all moving about him.

"Why, Mat! what the devil's come to you now? Are you ill? Have you hurt yourself with that picture?" asked Zack, startled by the incomprehensible change which he beheld in Mr. Marksman's face and manner.

"Come out," said Mat. Young Thorpe looked at him in amazement; even the sound of his voice had altered!

"Can you wait two minutes, old fellow? I wanted to go up stairs, and say how-d'ye-do to Mrs. Blyth. But if you're really out of sorts, and —"

"Come out," repeated Mat, taking him by the arm, and forcing him to leave the room.

"What's wrong?" asked Zack. No answer. They went quickly along the passage and down to the garden gate, in silence. As soon as they had got into one of the lonely bye-roads of the new suburb, Mr. Marksman stopped short; and, turning full on his companion, said: "Who is she?" The sudden eagerness with which he spoke, so strangely at variance with his usual deliberation of tone and manner, made those three common words almost startling to hear.

"*She?* Who do you mean?" enquired young Thorpe.

"That young woman they were all staring at."

For a moment, Zack contemplated the anxiety visible in his friend's face, with an expression of blank astonishment; then burst into one of his loudest, heartiest, and longest fits of laughter. "Oh, by Jove, I wouldn't have missed this for fifty pound. Here's old Rough and Tough

smitten with the tender passion, like all the rest of us ! Blush, you brazen old beggar, blush ! You've fallen in love with Madonna at first sight."

"D—n your laughing. Tell me who she is."

"Oh, Lord ! he's losing his temper now. Tell you who she is ? That's exactly what I can't do."

"Why not ? What do you mean ? Does she belong to that man."

"Oh, fie, Mat ! You mustn't talk of a young lady *belonging* to anybody, as if she was a piece of furniture, or money in the Three per Cents, or something of that sort. Confound it man, don't shake me in that way ! You'll pull my arm off. Let me have my laugh, and I'll tell you every thing."

"Tell it then ; and be quick about it."

"Well, first of all, she is not Blyth's daughter —though some scandal-mongering people have said she is —"

"Nor yet his wife ?"

"Nor yet his wife. What a question ! He adopted her, as they call it, years ago, when she was a child. But who she is, or where he picked her up, or what's her name, Blyth never *has* told

anybody, and never *will*. She's the dearest, kindest, liveliest little soul that ever lived ; and that's all I know about her. It's a short story, old boy ; but devilish romantic—isn't it ? ”

Mr. Marksman did not immediately answer. He paid the most breathless attention to the few words of information that Zack had given him—repeated them over again to himself—reflected for a minute or so—then said :—

“ Why won't he tell anybody who she is ? ”

“ How should I know ? It's a whim of his. And, I'll tell you what, Mat, here's a piece of serious advice for you :—If you want to go there again, and make her acquaintance, don't you ask Blyth who she is, or let him fancy you want to know. He's touchy on that point—I can't say why ; but he is. Every man has a raw place about him somewhere : that's Blyth's raw place, and if you hit him on it, you won't get inside of his house again in a hurry, I can tell you.”

Still Mr. Marksman's attention fastened greedily on every word—still his eyes fixed eagerly on his informant's face—still he repeated to himself what Zack was telling him.

"By the by, I suppose you saw the poor dear little soul is deaf and dumb," young Thorpe continued. "She's been so from a child. Some accident; a fall, I believe. But it don't affect her spirits a bit. She's as happy as the day is long—that's one comfort."

"Poor creature!—and so like *her*, too; it was a'most as awful as seeing the dead come to life again—she had Mary's turn with her head; Mary's—ah, poor creature! poor creature!" He whispered these words to himself, under his breath, his face turned aside, his eyes wandering over the ground at his feet, with a faint, troubled, vacantly anxious expression.

"Oh, hang it! don't be getting into the dolefuls already," cried Zack, laughing again; and administering an exhilarating thump on the back to his friend. "The despairing lover don't suit your line of character, old boy. Cheer up! We're all in love with her; you're rowing in the same boat with Bullivant, and Gimble, and me, and lots more; and you'll get used to it in time, like the rest of us. I'll act the generous rival with you, brother Mat!" Here he struck a stage attitude. "You shall have all the benefit

of my experience and advice gratis ; and shall lay siege to our little beauty in regular form. How do you mean to make love to her ? Did you ever make love to a Squaw ? Oh, Lord ! he'll be the death of me if he goes on looking sentimental like that."

"She isn't his wife ; and she isn't his daughter ; he won't say where he picked her up, or who she is." Repeating these words to himself in a quick, quiet whisper, Mr. Marksman grew more thoughtful than ever. He looked away from young Thorpe, and did not appear to be listening to a single word that he said. His mind was running now on one of the answers he had wrested from Johanna Grice, at Dibbledean—the answer which had informed him that Mary's child had been born alive !

"Wake up, Mat ! You shall have your fair chance with the lady, along with the rest of us ; and I'll undertake to qualify you on the spot for civilised courtship," continued Zack, pitilessly carrying on his joke. "In the first place, always remember that you mustn't go beyond passionate admiration at a respectful distance, at the first interview. . At the second, you may make

amorous faces, at close quarters—what you call, looking unutterable things, you know. At the third, you may get bold, and try her with a little present. Lots of people have done that, before you. Gimble tried it, and Bullivant wanted to; but Blyth wouldn't let him; and I mean to give her——oh, by Jove! I've got another important caution for you." Here he indulged himself in a fresh burst of laughter, excited by the remembrance of his interview with Mrs. Peckover, in Mr. Blyth's hall. "Remember that the whole round of presents is open for you to choose from, except one; and that's a Hair Bracelet. You mustn't think of giving her—Hullo! What's the matter now?"

Zack's laughter came to an abrupt termination. Mat had raised his head suddenly, and was now staring him full in the face again, with a bright searching look—an expression in which suspicious amazement and doubting curiosity were very strangely mingled together.

"You're not angry with me for cracking a few respectable old jokes?" said Zack. "Hang it! I haven't said anything—Stop! yes I have, though I didn't mean it. You looked up at me

in that queer way, when I told you about not giving her a Hair Bracelet; and I'll bet five to one you thought I said it to make fun of you're not having any hair on your own head to give anybody—didn't you now? D—n it, old fellow! I'm not such a beast as to make jokes on your misfortune. I never thought of you, or your head, or that infernal scalping business, when I said what I did. It was true—it happened to *me*. Don't go on looking like an old savage, Mat. I'll prove it to you. Look here, I wanted to give her a Hair Bracelet myself—my hair and Blyth's, and so on. And a queer old woman who seems to know Madonna (that's a name we give her) as well as Blyth himself, and keeps what she knows just as close, fell foul of me about it, all of a sudden, in the passage. She talked a lot of rigmarole, and said a Hair Bracelet would be unlucky to Madonna; and then told me she had one already; and then wouldn't let me ask Blyth whether it was true, because I should get her into dreadful trouble if I said anything to him about it; besides a good deal more which you wouldn't care to be bothered with. But I have said enough—haven't I?—to show I was not

thinking of *you*, when I rapped that out just now by way of a joke. Come, shake hands, old fellow. You're not offended with me now I have explained everything?"

Mat gave his hand; but he put it out like a man groping in the dark. He was thinking of that letter about a Hair Bracelet, which he had found in the box given to him by Johanna Grice.

"A Hair Bracelet?" he said, vacantly.

"Don't be sulky!" cried Zack, clapping him on the shoulder.

"A Hair Bracelet—unlucky to the young woman—and she's got one already" (he was weighing attentively the lightest word that Zack had spoken to him). "What's it like?" he asked aloud, turning suddenly to young Thorpe.

"What's what like?"

"A Hair Bracelet."

"Still sticking to that, after all my explanations! Like? why it's hair plaited up, and made to fasten round the wrist, with gold at each end to clasp it by. What the devil are you stopping for again? I'll tell you what, Mat, I can make every allowance for a man in your love-struck situation—but if I didn't know how you had been

spending the morning, I should say you were drunk."

They had been walking along quickly, while Mr. Marksman asked what a Hair Bracelet was like. But no sooner had Zack told him than he came to a dead pause—thought for a moment—started and changed colour—opened his lips to speak—than checked himself, and remained silent. Young Thorpe's description had recalled to him a certain object that he had seen in the drawer of Mr. Blyth's bureau; and the resemblance between the two had at once flashed upon him. The importance which this discovery assumed in his eyes, in connection with what he had already heard, may be easily estimated when it is remembered that his barbarian life had kept him totally ignorant that a Hair Bracelet is in England one of the commonest ornaments of woman's wear.

"Are we going to stop here all day?" asked Zack. "Oh, confound it, if you're turning from sulky to sentimental again, I shall go back and have my talk with Mrs. Blyth, and pave the way for you with Madonna, old boy!" He turned in the direction of Valentine's house, as he said

these words, anticipating in high glee all the jokes that he and his friends would make on the subject of Madonna's new conquest.

Mat did not offer to detain him ; did not say a word at parting. He passed his hand wearily over his eyes as Zack left him. "I'm sober," he said vacantly to himself; "I'm not dreaming; I'm not light-headed, though I feel a'most like it. I saw that young woman as plain as I see them houses in front of me now; and by God if she had been Mary's ghost, she couldn't have been more like her!"

He stopped. His hand fell to his side; then fastened mechanically on the railings of a house near him. His rough, misshapen fingers trembled round the iron that they held incessantly. Recollections that had slumbered for years and years past, were awakening again awfully to life within him. Through the obscurity and oblivion of long absence, through the chill, changeless darkness of the tomb, there was shining out now, vivid and solemn on his memory, after a dimness of many years, the image—as she had been in her youth-time—of the dead woman, whose name was "Mary." And it was only the

sight of that young girl, of that poor shy-looking, tender-faced, deaf and dumb creature, that had wrought the miracle !

He tried to shake himself free of the influences that were now at work on him. He moved forward a step or two, and looked up. Zack !—where was Zack ?

Away, at the other end of the solitary suburban street, just visible sauntering along and swinging his stick in his hand.

Without knowing why he did so, Mat turned instantly and walked after him, calling to him to come back. The third summons reached him : he stopped, hesitated, made comic gesticulations with his stick in the air—then began to retrace his steps.

The effort of walking and calling after him turned Mat's thoughts in another direction. They now began to occupy themselves again with the hints that Zack had dropped (by way of explaining himself to his friend) of some incomprehensible connection between a supposititious Hair Bracelet and the young girl who was called by the strange name of "Madonna." With the remembrance of this, there came back also the recollection of the

letter about a bracelet, and its enclosure of hair, which he had examined in the lonely cattle-shed at Dibbledean, and which still lay in the little box bearing on it the name of "Mary Grice."

"Hullo there!" cried Zack, speaking as he came on. "Hullo, old Cupid, what do you want with me now?"

Mr. Marksman did not immediately answer. His thoughts were still travelling back cautiously over the ground that they had already explored. Once more, he was pondering on that little circle of plaited hair, having gold at each end, and looking just big enough to go round a woman's wrist, which he had seen in the drawer of Mr. Blyth's bureau. And once again, while he thought on it, the identity between this object and the ornament which young Thorpe had described as being the thing called a Hair Bracelet, began surely and more surely to establish itself in his mind.

"Now then, Mat, don't keep us waiting," continued Zack, laughing again as he came nearer: "clap your hand on your heart, and give me your tender message for the future Mrs. Marksman."

It was on the tip of Mat's tongue to emulate the communicativeness of young Thorpe, and speak unreservedly of what he had seen in the drawer of the bureau—but he suddenly restrained the words just as they were dropping from his lips. At the same moment his eyes began to lose their vacant perturbed look, and to brighten again with something of intelligence and cunning added to their customary watchful expression.

“What's the young woman's real name?” he asked carelessly, just as Zack was about to banter him for the third time.

“Is that all you called me back for? The devil take your amorous impudence?—What's her real name? Her real name's Mary.”

Mat had made his inquiry with the air of a man whose thoughts were far away from his words, and who only spoke because he felt obliged to say something. Zack's reply to his question, however, startled him into instant and anxious attention.

“Mary!” he repeated in a tone of surprise. Then added quickly, “What else besides Mary?”

“How should I know? Didn't I try and beat

it into your muddled old head, half an hour ago, that Blyth won't tell anybody anything about her?"

Mat turned a little away. The secrecy in which Mr. Blyth chose to conceal Madonna's history, and the sequestered place in the innermost drawer of his bureau where he kept the Hair Bracelet, began vaguely and indefinitely to connect themselves together in Mr. Marksman's mind. A curious smile hovered about his lips, and the cunning look in his eyes brightened more and more. "The Painter Man won't tell anything about her, won't he? Perhaps that thing in his drawer will." He muttered this to himself, putting his hands in his pockets, and mechanically kicking away a stone that happened to lie at his feet on the pavement.

"What are you mumbling about now?" asked Zack. "Do you think I'm going to stop here all day for the pleasure of hearing you talk to yourself?—If you call after me again, you'll call a long time before you get me to come back, old boy." With these words, he vivaciously rapped his friend on the shoulder with his stick, and ran off in the direction of Mr. Blyth's house.

“It *was* a hair Bracelet. I know, by what Zack said, it was a Hair Bracelet,” continued Mat, still mumbling his words to himself, still with his hands in his pockets, still kicking at the pavement, though there was no stone left on it to kick now.

“I’ll see if I can’t have some fun with Mrs. Blyth about *you!*” thought young Thorpe, as he stopped for an instant, and turned round to see whether Mat was going home or not.

“I’ll see if I can’t have another look at your friend’s Hair Bracelet,” thought Mr. Marksman, glancing up at that moment, and nodding over his shoulder at Zack—then walking away quickly in the direction of Kirk Street.

END OF VOL. II.

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